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ABSTRACT

This study examined the quality and characteristics of black families in South Africa. The research focused on three areas: values and norms regarding marriage and family life, the deterioration of traditional and parental authority, and parenting skills. The fieldwork was done during the years 1988-1990 and consisted mostly of group interviews and group discussions with over 300 respondents across 3 generations; all interviews were taped and subsequently analyzed. A qualitative research design was employed to collect, organize, and interpret the research data. Data were analyzed according to a descriptive approach providing for the individual experiences and views of black South Africans regarding their family life. The main strengths of the family as revealed by the group interviews and discussions appeared to be the enduring belief in the family as an institution, and in its resilience under adverse circumstances. The most serious weaknesses found were the decline of parental and adult authority coupled with debilitating structural problems. The latter include the physical absence of parents or caregivers, often for long periods of time. The recommendations derived from the results concentrate on ways and means to maintain or achieve a close bond between caregivers and youth. (Contains 51 references.) (Author/AS)

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Report HG/MF-16 1994

Strengths and weaknesses in the family life of black South Africans

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Sylvia Viljoen

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Co-operative Research Programme on Marriage and Family Life
Human Sciences Research Council

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Strengths and weaknesses in the family life of black South Africans

Sylvia Viljoen

Emeritus Professor of Sociology, UNISA

Co-operative Research Programme on Marriage and Family Life
HSRC, Pretoria
1994

The Co-operative Research Programme on Marriage and Family Life is centred within the Group: Social Dynamics of the Human Sciences Research Council. The emphasis in the programme is on the structure and dynamics of family life, the nature of family disorganization and disintegration, and the nature of the changes taking place with regard to family structure and family processes in society. In this report the emphasis is on the strengths and weaknesses in African family life and how these pertain to family policy.

The opinions expressed in the report are those of the author and should not necessarily be viewed as those of the Main Committee of the Co-operative Research Programme on Marriage and Family Life.

CO-OPERATIVE RESEARCH PROGRAMME ON MARRIAGE AND FAMILY LIFE

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EKSERP

Die navorsing fokus veral op drie gebiede van die huweliks- en gesinslewe, naamlik waardes en norme betreffende die huwelik en die gesin, agteruitgang in tradisionele en ouerlike gesag, en ouerskapstrategieë.

Veldwerk is gedurende die jare 1988-1990 onderneem en het meestal uit groeponderhoude bestaan: 24 onderhoude met groepe professionele persone, 14 met groepe grootouers, 17 met groepe ouers en 13 met groepe jeugdiges; en vyf driegenerasie-werkseminare (waarby ongeveer 200 mense betrokke was). Al hierdie onderhoude is op band vasgelê en later ontleed.

Die vernaamste kragte van die gesin soos geopenbaar deur die onderhoude was die diep en blywende geloof in die gesin as 'n instelling en in die gesin se buigbaarheid en veerkragtigheid. Die ernstigste swakhede is die afname in die gesag van ouers en volwassenes tesame met verlammende strukturele probleme. Laasgenoemde sluit die fisiese afwesigheid van ouers of versorgers in, dikwels vir lang periodes. Die aanbevelings konsentreer dus onder andere op maniere om 'n noue band tussen versorgers en die jeug te behou of tot stand te bring.

ABSTRACT

The research focused on three areas of marriage and family life, namely values and norms regarding marriage and the family, the deterioration of traditional and parental authority, and parenting strategies.

The fieldwork was done during the years 1988-1990 and comprised mostly group interviews: 24 interviews with groups of professionals, 14 with groups of grandparents, 17 with groups of parents and 13 with groups of youths; and five intergenerational work seminars (involving about 200 people). All these interviews were taped and subsequently analysed.

The main strengths of the family as revealed by the group interviews appeared to be the enduring belief in the family as an institution, and in its resilience under adverse circumstances. The most serious weaknesses were the decline of parental and adult authority coupled with debilitating structural problems. The latter includes the physical absence of parents or care-givers, often for long periods of time. The recommendations therefore concentrate *inter alia* on ways and means to maintain or achieve a close bond between care-givers and the youth.

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PREFACE

It is beyond the power of sociological research to solve the problems of the family in modern industrialised society. Assuming such a task would only lead to fresh illusions. We can and should, however, expect sociological research to face the situation squarely and at least prevent purely verbal solutions from being passed off as valid while the everyday life of millions of people is an endless round of suffering, with no witnesses and no escape. The problems of the family are not the outcome of individual intentions, good or bad. They are structural problems, the solution of which implies structural changes, that is to say, a basic transformation of the structure of present-day society (Ferraroti 1973:258).

The ideas above were propounded two decades ago, and stem from an era in the sociology of the family during which the "death of the family" was lamented or lauded with varying degrees of pessimism or optimism respectively. Nevertheless, Ferraroti's ideas apply to the spirit in which the Co-operative Programme on Marriage and Family Life was implemented in the nineteen eighties, albeit in another era and context than the one which gave rise to Ferraroti's ideas. In 1983 the Research Priority Committee of the HSRC identified marriage and family life in South Africa as a research priority. The committee's report was based on a feasibility study and led to the establishment of a co-operation committee tasked with initiating a multidisciplinary research programme on marriage and family life in South Africa.

During 1985 the co-operation committee arranged two working seminars. The participants were asked to present papers on the priority areas established by the feasibility study. These priority areas had been identified by experts from various helping professions and academics from various scientific disciplines. The participants were specifically requested to concentrate on research which had either been performed locally and/or was considered to be essential. The research reported here should be seen against this background and is directly associated with the following quotation from a report resulting from the above two seminars:

> *[C]onsequently the recommendation of the co-operation committee was that research with regard to the Black urban family should enjoy the highest priority and that a start be made as soon as possible with a comprehensive research programme in this regard* (Steyn *et al.* 1987:934).

Warm thanks to my colleagues Dr Sylvia Moeno and Prof. Sam Motshologane who, particularly in the pilot phase of the study, acted as supportive partners.

The research on which the present report is based involved literally hundreds of respondents over the last few years. A word of sincere thanks is due to all of them. The respondents included representatives in the helping professions such as social work and nursing, also spiritual leaders, leaders of regional welfare councils, grandparents, parents and youths in urban and rural areas throughout the country, as well as colleagues from various academic disciplines. To all of them I would again like to express my sincere thanks - it is their dedication and enthusiasm which make the introductory quotation particularly meaningful and which made the fieldwork for this research an enriching experience.

PROF. SYLVIA VILJOEN

CHAPTER 1

POSITIONING, AIMS AND RESEARCH DESIGN

Throughout the eighties, families in the United States as well as in other parts of the world continued to modify their structures and functions to accommodate changes in the larger society and its institutions. Indeed it is generally acknowledged that the survival of the family unit is highly dependent on its chameleonlike ability to absorb such external challenges and to adapt accordingly. It is during periods of rapid and extensive social change that this resilient character of families is particularly tested (Berardo 1990:809).

1.1. Introduction

The quotation above certainly also applies to South Africa. South African family life can therefore be viewed in the context of a rapidly changing social reality. It is particularly relevant to view research on the family in this broader context when considering the general concern for the state and quality of marriage and family life in South Africa. This was, in fact, the reason for the formation of the Co-operative Committee on Marriage and Family Life in the nineteen eighties. In a sense it also indicates a change in the way family life was perceived in the nineteen eighties. By contrast, in the nineteen seventies, the general sense was that of the "death of the family", or the irrelevance of the family for modern industrialised urban society. Nowadays the focus has shifted to questions about what can be done to improve the quality of marriage and family life, so as to make it more meaningful for members of families, particularly in the reconstruction of communities in South Africa in the last decade of the twentieth century.

The notion of resilience and the quality of marital and family life that resilience promises, require a perspective contrary to that of the "irrelevance" of marriage and the family. In research in this area such a perspective is often substantiated by referring to the contribution which "marital happiness" and "positive" family life make to the general or global quality of life (Glenn & Weaver 1981; Ripple, Zollar & Williams 1987).

The present study can therefore be grounded by acknowledging the quality of marriage and family life as cardinal themes. These themes encompass problems in this area as well as the general well-being of people and communities.

Within the broader context of social change one should, however, in stating aims, not only be concerned with theoretical assumptions but also consider the historical context in South Africa. By way of introduction to the present study on the

strengths and weaknesses of the family life of black South Africans, the historical context will therefore be discussed in general terms.

1.2 Aims of project

The completion of a priority study, which spawned the co-operative committee, should be seen as the consequence of a general concern about and reflection on the state of research on family life in South Africa. In part, this was the motivation for the present study, and also represents a generally expressed concern regarding marriage and family disorganisation in black communities.

In this regard, one of the conclusions reached during the two seminars related specifically to the family life of black South Africans. There are many myths and stereotypes about the family life of black people which can be confronted with the results of descriptive studies. The present project was an attempt at bridging this "information gap" in the sociology of families. Although there are descriptive studies from cultural and social anthropology in particular, the same cannot be said about sociology, and the following words of Kayongo-Male and Onyango (1984:1) are relevant here:

> *Although families all over the world do have similarities, African students, lecturers and scholars often find Western textbooks on the family unsuitable for a full understanding of the dynamics of African family life. What is vitally needed are more books and research on African family life from a sociological point of view.*

1.2.1 Against this background the first, general aim with this study was to obtain more information about the family life of black South Africans by means of a descriptive study.

A further important consideration was that the field of research should be defined by black South Africans. For this reason interviews and group discussions with professionals and other members of the helping professions formed part of a pilot study or explorative phase. This group included ministers of religion, community and other nurses, social workers and people involved with youth actions or programmes.

These discussions spawned the general theme, namely the strengths and weaknesses of the family life of black South Africans - a theme which became the title of this research project. Too often attention is focused exclusively on the problems of family life. Although this cannot be disregarded, it is equally important to consider the strengths or bonds within families.

During the course of the project it was suggested that a theme such as this is normative or value laden. A counterargument is that the research aimed to let people indicate their own meanings and experiences. Although this approach rendered a "value-free" study impossible, the strengths and weaknesses in family life were established in terms of the intersubjective description of black South Africans themselves.

Against this background the following additional aims of the study can be outlined.

1.2.2 In the process of gathering data for a descriptive study on the family life of black South Africans, both strengths and weaknesses were considered.

This approach is supported by what Berardo (1990:817) said in his report (on the 1980s, looking ahead to the 1990s) regarding the direction of family sociology:

> *It is imperative in the decade ahead, that scholars and practitioners alike use their expertise to sensitise the public and the policy makers to family needs. Applying updated research knowledge to the development, implementation, and refinement of human resources policy designed to meet those needs should be the overarching objective of the future.*

In the discussion so far a further aim has already been implied:

1.2.3 The research data were geared at indicating the individual experiences and views of black people. With this in mind, an extensive literature study was purposely omitted; this contrasts with the usual practice of using such a study as a point of departure for research. Instead, the main source of information was discussions with professionals in helping professions, individuals and groups of people all of whom had experienced parenthood, or were experiencing it within the context of the family or household.

A fourth aim flows from the idea of research conceived of and executed "in the field":

1.2.4 In the collection and analysis of data, the aim was to consider the very practical nature and applicability of the data. If the results and conclusions reflected the real experiences and expressed actual needs of people, they could form a basis for the development of supportive programmes. In the explorative phase or pilot interviews the importance of research that focused on practice was emphasised. On the one hand, this was seen as a means to

develop therapeutic programmes for reconstructing families, and also, on a more preparatory and preventative level, for family enrichment programmes. On the other hand, more practically orientated research informs policy formulation which, in turn, influences families and their circumstances.

The underlying expectation was that such research might contribute to improving the quality of life of black South Africans through a process of family reconstruction in a new socio-political era. The research could also act as a guideline in the establishment of general social policy, and family policy in particular.

Since one of the above-mentioned aims was to focus on practical issues and on the experiences and meanings of the respondents, the exploratory phase was geared towards providing content and delimiting the area of research. In discussions it became clear that the concept "family in crisis" was particularly meaningful to people in certain areas. This gave rise to the final aim of this study:

1.2.5 Information would be obtained on the following three areas of family experience and activities:

* values and norms underlying the institution of marriage and the family;
* the erosion of traditional and parental authority, resulting in unmanageable youths; and
* lack of knowledge on different parenting skills.

In the pilot phase of the research, during which the area of research was explored and the above-mentioned aims were formulated, frequent remarks were heard regarding the unique nature of South African society with its clear difference between black people and non-black people. In this context reference was made to the family life of black South Africans as being in a "transitionary stage", resulting in both insecurity and disintegration (as weaknesses), but also in opportunities for creative redefining and reconstruction (as strengths). This implies that cognisance should be taken of the socio-political and socio-economic factors which played a role in the disintegration of the family life of black people. Research in this field can therefore never be a-historical or a-theoretical.

1.3 Historical and socio-political contextualisation of the study

A historical positioning of the research inevitably requires reference to the precolonial period during which traditional kinship structures and the extended family were basic family norms. For "family members" to be part of a household meant being enmeshed in a web of relationships with tribal lineage and kinship groups. These essential societal structures were changed fundamentally during the periods of colonialism and neo-colonialism.

With the arrival of the European culture on the continent of Africa, the local populations were introduced to a process of rapid social change. This had a radical effect on the central traditional societal structures such as family and kinship, and also led to large-scale changes which were often experienced as the disintegration of these structures.

In South Africa the discovery of gold and diamonds around 1870 was accompanied by mining and commercialised agriculture, which increased the necessity for (cheap) labour in order to increase the surpluses of the capitalist economy. At first, when black people still earned a living on their own land, industrial labour was ensured by the introduction of hut tax. This forced people from their subsistence economy into a capitalist economy, where they sold their labour in order to pay hut tax. Moreover, this "push factor" forced people to leave their homes and families.

Colonialism heralded the unequal distribution of power, and the domination and submission of the indigenous population. Typically, a relationship of dependency developed between the coloniser and the colonised, which constitutes the essence of development versus underdevelopment.

In South Africa, as in other countries, a relationship also developed between capital and the state. It was important for the state as well as the industries to recruit young, strong men for the mines and farms; women and children were thus expected to remain on pockets of land in the rural areas, living essentially in a subsistence economy supplemented by what little cash the labourer could "send home". In cities men were housed in single quarters and neither industry nor the state took responsibility for family housing and services. Low wages were justified by the "assumption" that the labourer owned land and that his wages merely supplemented the income he generated from the land. The resultant absence of the father led to the disruption of the home, as well as poverty and dependence.

From a Marxist perspective colonialism introduced other processes, such as industrialisation, urbanisation and modernisation. The interdependence of these

social processes affected communities and often resulted in the disruption of families. These processes involved, *inter alia*, the transition from a subsistence to a capitalist economy, forced labour, and the alienation of people from their land, culture and religion.

In a later period labour was controlled to an even larger extent by the policy of apartheid and the so-called homelands. At the same time strict influx control was applied and people could neither move about freely nor migrate as a family unit to the place where the breadwinner worked. Furthermore, relocation resulted in the disruption of community ties. This had a destructive effect on the family life of black people. Even after influx control had been abolished, a dire shortage of family housing and the limiting effect of controlled urbanisation meant that people required work and housing in order to migrate to cities and towns. The negative and disruptive impact of these processes would be felt by many future generations. This reminds one of a statement from Kayongo-Male and Onyango (1984:2):

> *Because both the earlier slave-trade period and the colonial period were justified by racist ideas which assumed that Africans had no family life, no culture and no civilization, slavery and all other experiences could not be destroying what did not exist! These racist notions persisted even when academic scholarship began on the continent. "Native" studies often contained elaborate details of exotic rituals and the "sexual life of savages" instead of details of the symbolic and social meaning of family life.*

One could argue that this quotation is an exaggeration within the South African context. Nzimandi (*in Steyn et al.* 1987:28-47) refers to a conflict of cultures and culture shock which had a disorganising effect on the structure of black families.

Harvey (1992), in his study on social change and family policy in South Africa between 1930 and 1986, clearly indicates that the system of apartheid, which had its roots in colonialism, had an effect on the family life of black South Africans. Concern about family disorganisation among non-black people was pronounced and support programmes and family policy in this respect received attention. This did not apply to blacks. Furthermore, apartheid laws had a direct disorganisational impact on the family life of black people. This included the migratory labour system, influx control and forced resettlement, to name but a few.

Theoretical assumptions naturally underlie any historical positioning of this project. Against this background the historical reality is viewed through different "windows". A theoretical foundation should therefore be explained, however briefly, in terms of sociological-theoretical points of departure. In terms of methodological alternatives, any theoretical position necessarily impacts directly on research strategies.

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1.4 Positioning of the study within a theoretical context

Ritzer's (1988) historical review of sociological theories highlights the middle of the twentieth century as a decade characterised by the growth of domination and also by the decreasing importance of the structural-functionalist theoretical approach. The importance of social change was highlighted in the previous paragraph; similarly, a change in the manner of theorising about the sociology of the family could and should be pointed out. Thus the general response to rapid social change, particularly after the Second World War, was indicative of a search for stability and a nostalgia for a time when life was simpler and governed by generally accepted norms and values about family life. The 1950s and 1960s can be seen as such a nostalgic point of reference within the domination of structural functionalism as a macro approach to society and in particular to the institution known as "the family". This era is sometimes referred to as the "golden era of the nuclear family". The last half of the present century is dominated by critical/radical theories such as those of Marxism and neo-Marxism, as well as by more theories on the micro level, and a group of theoretical approaches which Monica Morris (*in* Ritzer 1988:191) calls "creative sociology". In addition, Ritzer (1988) acknowledges the rise of feminist theories as a meaningful "outsider" event.

Ritzer's review of sociological theory from "classical" to contemporary times is relevant to the sociology of the family which forms the basis for the present study. For decades, even after its loss of prominence in mainstream sociology, structural functionalism has dominated the stage in the sociology of the family. This is clear from the following quotation of Ekpe (1983:484), who deals with supportive services and welfare in Nigeria and attempts to position his work historically and theoretically:

> *The basic structure of African life is the family. Even before the arrival of the white man* [probably also woman - author's note] *in Africa, the social structure possessed a system of organising behaviour and economy, a cultural system for the preservation of its uniqueness and independence, a system of control and integration.*

The theoretical assumptions of functionalism were only criticised in the late nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties, particularly by way of the critical approach in feminism. The critique centred on issues such as "the family" as a monolithic concept, the "fit" between the nuclear family and the urban industrialised context; and the perpetuation of the subordinate position of women as expressed in the so-called private and public spheres. In the late nineteen seventies a strong focus on the diversity of family forms and types questioned the "universality" of "the family".

Likewise, the focus shifted increasingly to conflict, divorce and disillusionment within the family. Authors, such as Morgan (1975) and Barret and McIntosh (1982), questioned the family as a "haven", by referring to it as a "prison", or to the limited experience of family life.

A more "critical-sociological-theoretical" view, as developed by Adorno, Horkheimer, Habermas and others (Ritzer 1988), was a reaction against the functionalist-positivist view as well as an acceptance of a more dialectical ("doing and knowing") and historical perspective on society.

The aim here is not to overemphasise the theoretical-methodological controversy or the ontological and epistemological level. On the other hand, oversimplification should be avoided. In this light the present study has an underlying interpretative, or, as referred to above, "creative" sociological-theoretical point of departure. (One could also call this "symbolic interactionism" as opposed to the more macro sociological approaches of functionalism and Marxism.) Given the above theoretical positioning this study was enriched by basic assumptions such as:

- Social life is not given as an external reality (or factual reality as in positivism), but constitutes the meaning given by people.
- One cannot talk about regularities in the sense of deterministic laws; instead, information is approached in an interpretative, "verstehen" way.
- Within the field of the family life of black South Africans, the study is approached from the theoretical assumption that people do not merely react to stimuli but construct their own social reality in terms of perceived meanings (Merton 1986, Walker 1985, Berger & Luckmann 1967).
- Hughes (1980:13) aptly remarks that "No technique or method of investigation (and this is true of the natural sciences as it is of the social) is self-validating; its effectiveness, its very status as a research instrument making the world tractable to investigation is dependent ultimately on a philosophical justification."

A similar theoretical point of departure underlies the choice of a qualitative research design which will be discussed in more detail in the next section. Essentially it involves a descriptive study, based on how people experience their own environment, or how they make sense of it, given the socio-political realities discussed previously. This gives content to the "texture" of family life and social networks.

1.5 Methodological points of departure

In conjunction with the historical orientation, Cheal (1991:x-xi) makes the following relevant statement about methodology:

> *One approach to knowledge, associated especially with positivism and standard sociological theory, conceives of knowledge as a set of propositions. This leads naturally to a concern with the methods of reasoning by which propositions are produced, and with the methods for providing proof by which propositions are validated and made publicly available. A second approach, associated especially with Marxism and the sociology of knowledge, conceives of knowledge as the subjective outcome of social structures. This leads to a concern with the social determination of ideas and ideology.*

Cheal elaborates as follows on the relationship between sociological-theoretical diversity and cultural pluralism: "How we deal with theoretical pluralism within Sociology is an index of how we deal with cultural pluralism in contemporary society in general" (1991:xi). Without attempting to be a leading singer in this "chorus", the present study is associated with this "mainstream" sociology, in the sense that it sees problems and strengths in families as important aspects within the encompassing theme of change (i.e. modernisation). This emphasises the relevance of the present study. The above theoretical argument leads to the following assumptions which underlie the methodological points of departure of this study:

* Knowledge is not merely a body of facts awaiting "discovery" and application to all humans.
* There is no single "social reality" which applies to all people; rather, knowledge is "created" and changed by people within historical time frames.
* In addition to the aim of programme development this means that reality, as created and experienced by people, forms the basis for the development of empowerment programmes.

Using an interpretative or "creative" sociological point of departure, the choice of a qualitative research design naturally follows from the methodological implications of subjective factors in social research.

1.5.1 Choice of a qualitative research design

Halfpenny (1979:802) explains the dual aims of an interpretative approach to research as follows:

> *... to grasp the meanings that actions have to the actors involved and describe those meanings in culturally appropriate terms, and to establish the patterns of interaction that are understandable within the culture under study ...*

Apart from the premise that theoretical assumptions influence, or even mandate the choice of a qualitative research design, Walker (1985:3) mentions various other relevant considerations:

- A qualitative design is appropriate where information is insufficient or theory is inadequate for the development of a schedule for interviews, questionnaires or other quantitative techniques. (This was taken into consideration in formulating the aims of the study.)
- Walker also refers to the "complexity" and "sensitivity" theme for which a qualitative research design is more appropriate. Based on the socio-political approach outlined above, this also validates a study of the strengths and weaknesses of the family life of black South Africans.
- Walker's other consideration is that quantitative techniques in the above-mentioned type of research may elicit superficial responses, or that an institution may be studied in order to understand the relationships. This would certainly also apply in the choice of a research design.

In the new era in South Africa, where the reconstruction of family life will surely receive high priority, a further consideration is that descriptive studies against a qualitative background may provide insights with regard to family policy. To quote from Walker once more (Sudman *in* Walker 1985:19):

> *What qualitative research can offer the policy maker is a theory of social action grounded on the experiences - the world-view of those likely to be affected by a policy decision or thought to be part of the problem. The theory may, or may not, include specific references to the subjects' definitions of the policy problem, to their wishes or their likely reaction to policy initiatives. But it should be derived systematically and methodologically from the researcher's understanding of his (sic) subjects in a way that restores the legitimacy of subjectivity, and - even more important - gives it visibility and weight so that decisions and actions can be more accurately assessed.*

Thus the choice of a qualitative research strategy was theoretically grounded and inspired by pragmatism, and does not necessarily imply a rejection of quantitative techniques.

1.5.2 Research design

In stating the aims of the present research, mention has already been made of the explorative phase. Some elaboration is necessary here, since it has a bearing on further insights and choices regarding research strategies.

1.5.2.1 *Explorative phase*

Exploratory interviews and group discussions with professionals in helping professions in the urban areas of Pretoria and the Witwatersrand delimited the three research fields and the target groups. This can be summarised as follows:

* The rationale for research about values and norms underlying family life was highlighted during discussions. There was agreement that, in general, South Africans attach great value to children and the binding force of households or families. Within the encompassing theme of research, this general belief in and commitment to a high quality of family life was seen as an important "strength". It gives high priority to programmes aimed at the reconstruction and enrichment of marriage and family life, particularly in a new socio-political dispensation where structural limitations from the past can be eradicated. On the other hand, there were signs of uncertainty about, and an acknowledgement of, the decay of normative customs which could indicate problems in family life under present conditions.
* The same argument could be applied to parental authority, which traditionally was an integrative force in family life. Against the background of changing circumstances great concern has emerged about the decline of this authority.
* The practice of parenthood was frequently described as problematic, both in rural and in urban areas. On the one hand, ignorance and incompetence could lower the quality of family life, and on the other hand, research in this respect could contribute towards programmes and policies which aim to strengthen family life.

A further "decision", made in co-operation with the respondents during the explorative phase, was to demarcate the target group as follows:

- groups of professionals in helping professions, in other words professionals or others who provide family-related services;
- groups involved in parenthood and who have personal experience of weaknesses and strengths in family life;
- groups of grandparents who raise their own grandchildren or the children of relatives and friends. Rural grandparents, in particular, often find themselves in this position.

Experience during the explorative phase also prompted the decision to use group discussions for collecting information, rather than contact at an individual level. It was also decided to include not only urban, but also "rural" areas.

1.5.2.2 *Group discussions with professionals*

Two rounds of discussions were conducted on the strengths and weaknesses of the family life of black South Africans.

Due to the involvement of the researcher in the Transvaal Midlands region of the regional welfare council for black people, this institution served as the source of contact groups. Regional welfare councils consist of professionals (including social workers, spiritual leaders, teachers and nurses) and representatives from particular neighbourhoods appointed by various bodies concerned with welfare needs and the co-ordination of welfare services "at the grass-roots level". The chairpersons of these councils are ex-colleagues of the researcher in the field of social work. During a first round of visits to them, the nature of the research was explained and, with their co-operation, group discussions were conducted with the professionals. The following regions were visited:

- four regions in the Transvaal, with discussions in Nelspruit, Pietersburg, KaNgwane and the PWV area;
- four regions in the Cape, with discussions in Cape Town, East London, Port Elizabeth and Queenstown;
- two regions in Natal, with discussions in Pietermaritzburg and Durban; and
- two regions in the OFS with discussions in Bloemfontein and Botshabelo.

Each group consisted of four to seven members. These numbers are to some extent arbitrary but are nevertheless in accordance with the tenets of group dynamics with regard to participation and possible differences in experience and point of view.

The "open" discussions were taped and notes were taken on what was regarded as strengths and/or weaknesses in the family life of black people in the region. The necessity to obtain information for the development of programmes was usually discussed with the respondents.

During the first round of group discussions a contact person was involved when planning the groups for the second round. These groups were to include groups of grandparents, parents caring for their biological children, and youths. The contact persons were also requested to act as facilitators or to suggest facilitators that could double as interpreters.

The first round of discussions made it possible to draw up a "list" of problem areas in family life. Lists such as these varied somewhat from region to region, for

example political and structural problems were more prominent in Natal, the youth was emphasised in the Orange Free State, and poverty and family disintegration were identified as the most pressing problems in the Eastern Cape and other regions. There was a fairly general consensus that these areas be studied.

During the first round a total of 24 group discussions were conducted; eight in the Transvaal, seven in the Cape, four in the OFS and five in Natal.

1.5.2.3 *Group discussions involving three generations*

In the above regions the contact persons established groups consisting of grandparents, parents and young people from the surrounding area. The groups consisted of five to ten members. No requirements regarding representativeness were set and pragmatic factors such as availability probably influenced the choice of group members. In general, the discussions were held in townships or — in rural areas — in private homes or local halls or offices where people would normally meet.

Where contact people did not have command of the local language, provision was made for interpreters so that the respondents could better express themselves in their mother tongue. These interpreters could assist the researcher in keeping up with the flow of the conversation.

The discussions were taped, and the local vernacular (which was often used in grandparent groups) was translated during transcription.

During this round of group discussions the following strategies were used to ensure the easy flow of discussions.

- Attempting to maintain rapport between the researcher and the group. This was done by initiating the discussion while enjoying snacks, so as to create a more amicable climate.
- Explaining the aims and nature of the research. It was emphasised that there were no "right" or "wrong" answers and that the respondents were to concentrate on their own experiences of factors which could influence family life positively or negatively.
- Encouraging the discussion of an issue when the respondents considered it to be important. All members did not participate to the same extent, but less "vocal" members would express agreement or disagreement with the opinions of others. In such cases members were requested to explain their own views or to clarify a certain "contribution", by asking them whether the researcher's interpretation did in fact reflect their own opinions.

- Allowing group members to select the topic of conversation. The assumption was that people are inclined to discuss matters which are relevant to their lives - even if discussions at times stray from the central issue.
- Asking the respondents to comment on the generality of issues identified as important in other regions.

A total of 44 group discussions, extending over three generations, were conducted:

- 14 with groups consisting of grandparents who were the primary care-givers of children;
- 17 with parents; and
- 13 with groups of youths.

As mentioned above, the groups had five to ten members with seven probably being the average. In total more than 300 respondents were involved.

Unfortunately no record of numbers was kept. On reflection it would have been a good idea if a short questionnaire could have been given to the respondents in order to record gender, age and so forth. Such a demographic analysis would certainly have improved the depth of the analysis, and the lack thereof should be seen as a limitation of the study.

Based on the first two rounds of group discussions, certain issues appeared to be important in terms of the strengths and weaknesses of the three main topics outlined for the study. Some groups considered more than one issue to be particularly important, whereas the concerns of other groups were limited to one issue.

It was also possible to discuss with later groups themes which had emerged at earlier group discussions. Transcriptions highlighted certain statements which needed clarification, and for this reason a decision was made to conduct work seminars in certain areas. The feasibility of such seminars determined the choice of the areas, and violence in some areas proved to be prohibitive.

Once again professional contacts were utilised, particularly at regional welfare councils. Seminars were attended by professionals, by parents from the local communities, by grandparents who acted as parents and by youths.

1.5.2.4 *Work seminars*

The most common themes emerging from the group discussions formed the basis for discussion at the work seminars. These themes were "introduced" by one person, and such an introduction lasted for about ten minutes, whereafter the topic was open for discussion by all the participants, who could agree, disagree or offer new points of view.

During these discussions the researcher once again acted as facilitator. She not only had to clarify certain aspects, but also had to act as a link between the introducer and the audience. The work seminars were planned in co-operation with regional welfare councils and were based on written programmes. The participants were invited by the contact person, taking into account the ideal composition of the groups as set out above. In order to maximise participation and to limit the costs for meals and refreshments, the groups were limited to 50.

In co-operation with the contact persons, themes which had emerged from previous group discussions formed the basis for later discussions. These themes were introduced by members of the community welfare councils. They were requested to express their own opinions or experiences and to pose questions to these "audiences". In this way the trend was set for a spontaneous discussion.

Discussions were always informal and spontaneous. At times the researcher found it necessary to request the grandparents to respond to certain issues raised by the youths. This was done to stimulate discussion between the generations.

Work seminars were recorded on video tape. The transcription of these recordings formed part of the collection of data and was seen as supplementary material to the group discussions. The work seminars were not originally planned and should be seen as explorative (innovative). They involved both the collection of data and the clarification of data previously collected, and finally constituted exposure at a broader level.

Work seminars were conducted in Nelspruit, Pretoria, Bloemfontein, Port Elizabeth and Queenstown. Approximately 200 respondents were involved during this phase.

While it was possible for respondents to have been included in the group discussions as well as the work seminars, new respondents were generally introduced in the latter.

Work seminars produced not only more information, but permitted clarification of uncertainties which had arisen before. Thus the groups could comment on or validate these uncertainties.

The six-hour long session (including two and a half hours for refreshments and lunch) proved to be popular, and the participants generally indicated that they had learnt from one another. As was the case during the group discussions, the elderly respondents appreciated the opportunity to discuss family matters with the youth, to explain the meaning of certain traditional customs and to try to understand that the younger generation attached their own meaning to these matters. When the data are discussed below, this "argument" between the generations will be highlighted.

1.6 Organisation and interpretation of data

As defined in the objectives of the project, the data were collected by means of a qualitative research design. Thus the respondents shared their experiences and insights regarding the strengths and weaknesses of the family life of black South Africans by means of group discussions.

The information which was obtained during the interviews and group discussions with professionals in supporting professions could be pursued in the subsequent group discussions with the grandparents, parents and youths. The tape recordings of the discussions and group discussions were transcribed and translated. During subsequent work seminars uncertainties about any of the trends and information which had been gathered could be further explored and investigated. In this way the respondents had the opportunity to formulate their own ideas, opinions and experiences and to discuss it among themselves. This assisted greatly in the interpretation and ordering of material.

This type of methodological exploration which involves gathering, ordering and interpreting data "in the field" is in agreement with the view expressed by Godsell (1983:10):

> *Involving participants in discussions at all stages of research will confirm their status as part of a team trying to shed light on certain phenomena, rather than passive objects to be manipulated by the researcher in pursuit of goals.*

The data were organised around the following broad themes which had emerged from the discussions and which had been formulated in the aims of the study:

- norms and values underlying marriage and family life;
- the dissolution of parental authority; and
- the lack of knowledge of parenting skills.

Some overlap was inevitable, and particularly as far as parenting skills were concerned, the respondents found it difficult to give "content" to the discussions. It was also difficult to discuss the strengths as well as the weaknesses of family life - in some cases it seemed as if only problems and weaknesses were of concern.

In the interpretation and description of the data, the views of Looker *et al.* (1989:314) on a "split" between quantitative and qualitative research in sociology were taken into account. These authors contend that fieldwork carried out within a qualitative research design can be supported by verbatim quotations. Their view (Looker *et al.* 1989:314) of the interpretation of data within a qualitative design, in sociology at least, is that:

Field research tends to have a sample limited in both size and scope, and a limited number of variables for which there is information from every individual. Its strength is in getting the richness of information in the respondent's own words, not some preselected and potentially artificial categories.

Transcriptions of the discussions were analysed in terms of the three areas as projected. Matters of concern to the respondents were, as far as possible, categorised in this way and will be interpreted in three separate chapters.

1.7 Summary

1.7.1 The research is based on the conclusion, drawn from previous reflections on the issues, that there is a lack of knowledge regarding the quality of family life of black South Africans.

1.7.2 The results were analysed according to a descriptive approach providing for the experiences and views of black people regarding their family life.

1.7.3 The research focused on three areas: values and norms regarding marriage and family life, the deterioration of traditional and parental authority, and parenting skills.

1.7.4 Previous discussions and considerations on the family life of black South Africans often failed to account for the diversity of their experiences and their own perception of their marriage and family life. "Informed" research results should form the backdrop to a critical evaluation of the extent to which western concepts and family phenomena are "translated" in the case of black people.

1.7.5 It is essential to consider the role of socio-political factors in the disintegration of family life in black communities in order to contextualise a study on the strengths and weaknesses in contemporary family situations.

1.7.6 A qualitative research design was employed to collect, organise and interpret information, as will be discussed in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 2

VALUES AND NORMS UNDERLYING THE FAMILY LIFE OF BLACK SOUTH AFRICANS

Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.
Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.
Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well pleasing unto the Lord.
(The Epistle of Paul the Apostle to the Colossians, iii:18-22)

Abolition of the family! Even the most radical flare up at this infamous proposal of the Communists. On what foundation is the present family, the bourgeois family, based? On capital, on private gain ... (Marx and Engels, The Manifesto of the Communist Party).

The above two quotations have not been juxtaposed in order to make any political or religious point, but to illustrate, in a dramatic way, some of the widely differing assumptions and values which underlie people's thinking about the family. On the one hand, we have an ideal model of the family which stresses stability and reciprocity. On the other hand, we have a picture of the family as part of a class-divided social structure, which consequently reflects conflict and antagonism as much as love and obedience. On the one hand, we have the apostle announcing the ideal which all should seek; on the other, the revolutionary seeking to "demystify" the family, to dig beneath the idealistic words in order to reach the "real" structure of human relationships (Worsley 1974:115).

2.1 Introduction

Worsley's comparison above still seems valid two decades later. It still applies to the orientation of the "general public" as well as to professional attitudes and points of departure in research on values and norms basic to family life. Thus information on family life remains very important. "The family" is still fundamentally questioned from various quarters whilst, on the other hand, the United Nations has requested that 1994 be the International Year of the Family:

> *Stronger families are seen as the most effective preventative measure against instability, crime, juvenile delinquency, drug and alcohol addiction, and lack of care for dependent family members, children, the aged and the disabled. It is seen as important that International Year of the Family 1994 encompasses the diversity of family forms and cultures* (Edgar 1991:39).

It is interesting to note that the family as agent for the protection of human values, cultural identity and historical continuity as theme ranks under the ten very important themes for this family year (Edgar 1991:30).

It seems, therefore, that the previous quotations underlie the importance of research and reflection on family values and norms. It also relates the discussion of the results to the broader societal context.

The above introduction also suggests that it is analytically possible to distinguish between **general** social and/or societal values and norms, and more **specific** values and norms about marriage and family life.

Alwin (1984), for example, studied patterns of change in what can be regarded as "parental socialisation values" from 1958 to 1983. In the context of parental socialisation values, reference is made to values about family size, preference for independence of children, values of obedience and conformity to norms. Within the same context, families and care-givers are seen as agents of socialisation who take primary responsibility for the transmission of culture, traditions, values and norms in communities.

On this value level an analysis of the transcriptions of the discussions reveals statements such as the following:

> *The value of respect has dominated for a long time in black culture* (group of grandparents in the Pietersburg area).
>
> *We blacks are a nation of respect* (group of parents in Natal).
>
> *Respect is the pillar on which all value systems rest* (group of experts in Bloemfontein).
>
> *In the olden days rules were very strict and yet they brought about respect for elders, respect for other people's property and respect for one another.*

The last quotation above are the words of a grandfather who attended the work seminar in Pretoria.

Statements on respect pave the way for other themes at a general value level, namely morality, love, a strong sense of religion, trust, honesty and freedom. But although one should not lose sight of these values, the present research dealt primarily with values and norms that are basic to marriage and family life. In fact, during the original phases of the research, experts and community leaders emphasised these values in particular. Critical questions, especially from those in the helping professions, dealt with values and norms which seemed relevant to contemporary marriages and families. These issues involved the following questions: what is deemed desirable, what is generally accepted as "right" or what is prescribed, what **should** happen in marriages and families, and finally, what is

rejected as "wrong" and therefore sanctioned? On the one hand, the respondents in the professional field who had experience in their respective fields, regarded these as essential questions. On the other hand, as grandparents, parents or youths, they were also aware on a more personal level of the strengths and weaknesses both at a general value level, and concerning more specific norms which had a direct bearing on marriage and family life.

2.2 Gathering and interpretation of information at value level

Values and norms about family life surfaced very clearly during the various phases of the group discussions. On the one hand, it was seen as a **strong factor** in family life because it was almost considered to be a "pillar" for an orderly society - that which is desired and valuable for a "healthy" family life. On the other hand, the absence of values and norms about family life, as experienced by the respondents, can arguably be seen as a **weakness** and a source of concern.

Within sociology (more particularly from a Parsonian structural-functional viewpoint) values and norms are sometimes described as communal or shared ideas about what is right and wrong, good and bad, desirable and undesirable. Values, then, are more general conceptions whilst norms are specific communal or shared standards or guidelines for behaviour in particular situations (Steyn & Van Rensburg 1985:36-40).

In established societies or cultures, existing values and norms are transmitted to new members of societies and to children during the process of socialisation.

Thus, due to the process of internalisation, values and norms are accepted as obvious. So-called traditional societies are often **characterised** as being based on the authority of tradition and custom. As such, traditional family values and norms are accepted without conscious reflection or analysis.

Within a framework of social change, either evolutionary or revolutionary, norms and values are questioned, and questions on norms and values basic to marriage and family life become relevant.

Values and norms about marriage and family life were often raised during the conversations and group discussions. Frequent mention was also made of that which applied traditionally (strengths) and the current absence of such value orientations and normative prescriptions or the weak cohesive powers these may have. It is therefore possible to interpret the results against the general background of social change.

The results about relevant values and norms were organised and interpreted in an explorative vein. The basic assumption was that people give their own meaning and

construct their own social reality. It was therefore decided to keep discussions about values and norms underlying marriage and family life unstructured and "open".

The discussions generally started off with a short explanation of the aims and nature of the research: why the research was undertaken - general concern about the nature of family life and what could be done with information in terms of the development of programmes to support or enrich family life. The three areas which had been identified were first explained and then, to set the ball rolling, a few probing questions, such as the following, were asked:

> Do the participants think that families are important to people nowadays, and do families play an important part in community life?
>
> What are the characteristics of a "strong" or "well-functioning" family as compared to "weak" or "disintegrated" families?
>
> If people strive for "healthy" family lives, how would they go about it?
>
> Do people nowadays know how to build or develop "strong" families?

Subsequently the participants were invited to talk (contribute or comment) freely on any of the above issues or related aspects. The discussions generally got under way quickly and progressed fluently.

- In the introductory discussion a simple distinction was made between "values" and "norms". However, it soon became clear that it would be more pragmatic to ignore this sociological distinction. For the purposes of this research the two concepts were therefore used interchangeably. In analysing the data it was easier to ask what the respondents accepted or experienced as normative for marriage and family life.
- The respondents soon realised for themselves that "norm" referred to what "should be" and to what was desirable, but that it did not always coincide with reality. Various groups acknowledged that certain norms might exist "in people's minds", but did not necessarily reflect in their behaviour.
- Although the three areas (values and norms, parental authority, and parental skills) were identified for analytical purposes, it was obviously difficult to make clear distinctions during the discussions, since the themes were interrelated. Although an attempt was made to avoid unnecessary repetition, aspects discussed with reference to values and norms will also be referred to in later chapters.
- Although each discussion and seminar developed a unique character, the first question always dealt with the value or importance of families as institutions. The respondents were allowed to give their own meaning to this question. The

discussion frequently led to the theme of social change and reference was made to historical developments and socio-political realities. These directed discussions were amplified by examples, doubts were raised and solutions were suggested. The guidelines which emerged from group discussions will be utilised in discussing and interpreting the data.

2.3 Values and norms about families as social institutions

Robert Staples (1985:1005) points out that the "ideology of the family" is a reality for black Americans. This includes a high value placed on marrying, having children and being part of a family.

A strong commitment to "the family" as social institution (i.e. the structure or construction, which can refer to "household", "homestead" or some other meaning attached to "family-like" groups) was evident in the overwhelming majority of the groups in the present study. As rationale for the study a "western" discussion of the possible loss of function as well as of the obsoleteness of the family met with a lack of understanding and the clicking of tongues.

Parents and grandparents were in agreement that people need families:

Marriage is sacred.

Marriage and family life are created by God.

Family life is from God.

The following words were spoken at a group discussion in the Eastern Cape:

The family in relation to other families is the basic unit of the community.

For this institution to continue and to survive, there should be values and norms.

Thus, community life in which people did not live in families and households seemed inconceivable. A grandparent in one of the groups made the comment that it was not fitting to give a position of leadership to an unmarried person. This statement did not elicit disagreement from any of the other group members.

Likewise, members of youth groups regarded "the family" as an important and basic social institution. Questions about their vision for the future were, without exception, within the context of marriage and/or children.

On the other hand, frequent reference was made to the phenomenon of single parenthood. The impression (supported by group members) was that it was not seen as a "deviation", even though it occurred more frequently than was the case in the traditional environment. Professionals, in particular, often regarded single parenthood as an acceptable and preferable family type. The "weakness" in this instance was not ascribed to the type of family, but to the financial hardships and

even poverty facing members of single-parent families. The work of Burman and Preston-Whyte (1992) reflects a similar view of single parenthood: not as deviant, but as an option which is consciously preferred.

Subtle distinctions can be drawn between the views of older and younger generations, the latter being more pragmatic and less influenced by tradition. A group of Standard 9 girls, on the outskirts of Pretoria, conducted a lively debate on marriage, education and career. Their conclusion was that they would prefer to complete their education and establish themselves in a career, rather than marry. Should an unplanned pregnancy arise, they would complete their education and preparation for a career after the birth of the baby, but not consider marriage until after they had completed the latter. A further example is that of a young male from an urban environment who "believed" in family life, but took the following position:

> *Before getting married I would like to have a good job to maintain myself, have money and therefore I can get married. Then I will know that I have enough money to start a family and afford whatever I need.*

These words can also be interpreted differently, namely that the respondent no longer relied on the extended family for the transfer of marital goods *(lobola)*.

The responses of the participants in the group discussions (which included three generations), conversations with experts and discussions in work seminars led to the conclusion that there was a high degree of commitment to family life. This does not mean, however, that there is no reason for concern about family disintegration. At this point the idea of social change is relevant, and the following "refrain" was heard: "... but values and norms on which a 'healthy' family life was based, have changed, and today families have lost their cohesive power ..." This statement does not apply only to black South Africans, as is shown by the following quotation from a newsletter of the United Nations (1985:5) on the impact that development has on families as social institutions:

> *Associated with the changes in roles and responsibilities stemming from the processes of modernization are shifts in values, including an emphasis on individualism, greater equality between men and women, pressures to adopt the values and perspectives of other, usually dominant groups and conflicts between family values and developmental values.*

During the discussions, frequent mention was made of the influence of modernisation and pressure from the dominant "white" culture which tends towards greater individualism, as was the case in the traditional kinship structures. The youth groups linked these responses to the socio-political history of South Africa.

An analysis of the transcriptions showed that the following aspects of family values were emphasised:

- changes in the meaning of *lobola* and polygamy; which led to
- more divorce and family disintegration; which were linked to
- changes in extended families and kinship structures;
- changes in the division of labour between men and women and the distribution of power in marriage; and
- values and norms related to sexuality in marriage and family life.

These categories will form the basis for the analysis of data in the rest of the chapter.

2.4 Impact of change and socio-political factors on family values

An analysis of the transcriptions of the discussions reveals that socio-political factors were linked to the "decline of family values" and subsequent disintegration of family life in virtually every discussion.

Groups of parents and grandparents often focused mainly on the transition from stable traditional family life to an urbanised and industrialised "white" environment. Various traditional institutions were influenced in this process, namely *lobola*, polygamy and the extended family of kinship networks. Youth groups and professionals were mainly concerned with issues such as poverty, housing, migratory labour, the forced resettlement of people and the devastating effect this had had on family values.

2.4.1 Polygamy as "strength" or "weakness" of family values

As social institution polygamy was frequently mentioned in conversations about family values. It was particularly men in groups consisting of grandparents who saw polygamy as a factor which had contributed to the stability of families in traditional communities. Older men elaborated on the fact that multiple wives contributed towards the activities of a household, and that polygamy also resulted in the spacing of births. But even members of youth groups often referred to polygamy as a positive characteristic of the traditional family. A student member of a Soweto group made the nostalgic remark that a man could no longer afford more than one wife (and therefore no longer enjoyed the benefits of the true extended family). Another view expressed by members of the same group, as well as by members of an Eastern Cape group, was based on a complicated computation which revealed that there were more women than men in society: polygamy was therefore seen as a

sensible institution. (It was suggested that men did women a favour when marrying more than one at a time!) Another respondent felt that polygamy satisfied the male ego. A male member of a group of matriculants in a rural area made the following statement with a lot of conviction: "We blacks are polygamous by nature."

In a work seminar an elderly man elaborated ("with respect") on the role of Christianity in the "disintegration of the traditional way of life". He concluded that polygamy was turned into a "sin" and that this contributed to the high divorce rate in modern society. According to him divorce did not exist in societies where polygamy was practised.

By contrast, young women were understandably less positive about the institution of polygamy. The following derogatory remarks were recorded: "What kind of love is this?", and "I do not share a husband and do not want to be shared".

A very interesting conversation on polygamy developed amongst a group of parents in a rural area in KaNgwane, and was later echoed by a group of teachers in the same area. The gist was that although women could not support the idea of polygamy, at least it gave them certain "rights" and men certain "obligations". This was due to the fact that polygamy was institutionalised.

Women felt strongly about the fact that institutionalised polygamy meant that men did not leave their first (or other) wives without support, such as happens now that polygamy is no longer an institution. The present situation was likened to marital infidelity which, according to the participants, was more common among black (or other!) men than among black women. Women related instances where the infidelity of men had been detrimental to their "legitimate" families.

The system of polygamy implied that a man had to care for all of his wives, but with infidelity and various parallel relationships his own family suffered for the sake of the latest "girlfriend". One almost gained the impression that a so-called polygamous nature was accepted. For example, one woman said that this kind of polygamy was practised so openly, that if a man died or something serious happened to him, all of the mistresses had to be informed.

The occurrence of marital infidelity was associated with family disintegration in many groups. In a youth group the following assumption was made: If a man was permitted to have five wives, he would have had no need for girlfriends and consequently there would have been no divorces.

In the South African context, monogamy is entrenched in the constitution, so that polygamy can hardly be a norm; yet the frequent reference to polygamy was strangely striking.

Polygamy was also frequently linked to customary unions. The ambivalence concerning the system of marital unions can be seen as a stress factor within the

general theme of the strengths and weaknesses of the family. This ambivalence cannot simply be regarded as the result of family norms which deviate from the traditional, since it was voiced in all groups, including the younger ones.

2.4.2 *Lobola* ("bridewealth") and customary unions

There were very few discussions during which *lobola* was not mentioned. Some respondents saw *lobola* as a "strength" of customary unions and emphasised the following issues:

- *Lobola* involved the family groups from both sides. This gave more "binding power" to the marriage and provided a "strong norm against divorce" (a youth group in Soweto).
- Some groups of parents and grandparents associated *lobola* with arranged marriages, often between relatives. This could bring about more respect for kinship.
- Since both family groups had a stake in the marriage, relatives could discuss and try to save problem marriages.
- *Lobola* was often accompanied by a lengthy process of negotiation which provided the opportunity for the couple and their families to get to know and to respect one another. A group of grandparents formulated this as follows:

  Because in the newly married couple there won't be that much respect from the female partner because she will feel that because the parents of my husband did not pay a thing at all I don't have any respect for the guy because he did not work for me - he got me for free.

- *Lobola* was frequently related to customary unions and grandparents in particular agreed that the disintegration of the system of customary unions and *lobola* contributed to a weakening of kinship networks. Therefore families became less stable. This was experienced as a disintegration of the norm of responsibility and mutual support of wider kinship networks and the so-called extended family.

However, the discussions revealed more than these positive and cohesive characteristics (strengths), and some ambivalence was also apparent. Some respondents found it difficult to regard *lobola* as either a strength or a weakness. Discussions on *lobola* were often initiated by mentioning the possibility of doing away with polygamy without replacing it with something else. For example, one rural youth group spent a lot of time discussing *lobola* and came to the conclusion that it had symbolic value but should be redefined in the modern context. They suggested that both families be involved in contributing financially to help the new couple to settle.

Additional negative issues were also raised:

- One argument was that *lobola* had lost its positive meaning in the contemporary urban environment. Instead, it had become commercialised, and consequently prompted young people to live together without any formal agreement.
- It was also argued that *lobola* benefited the parents of young women, since they regained the money they had spent on their daughters from their future son-in-law. The respondents frequently stated that it was the responsibility of parents to raise their children, and that they should not have to be repaid for this.
- In the urban environment, the lengthy negotiation process (which was portrayed in a positive light above) could be the cause of pregnancies, followed by the man deserting the woman and child.
- Some older respondents blamed Christianity for the negative meaning attached to *lobola*. Christianity was held responsible for the disappearance of the norm of permanence of marriage which had contributed positively to family life.
- The attitude of women, in particular, towards customary unions which legitimate *lobola*, was negative. They were squarely in favour of civil marriages which were associated with higher status and better legal protection.

2.4.3 Normative aspects of relations between kinship groups

Discussions on *lobola* and customary unions revealed that *lobola* was seen as one of the most important customs which transformed marriage and family life into more than a mere contract between people. The role of kinship networks was often drawn into the discussion. This brings to mind the following statement by Epke (1983:485): "African life is a type of unlimited responsibility." This interdependence is seen as a **strong positive factor**.

- Cursory references were also made to patterns of assistance. Although older respondents expressed sadness about increasing individualism, the conclusion can be drawn that kinship was still a "strength" in community life. For example, one member of a group of experts related how the death of her uncle contributed to the poverty of her family, since her father had to care for six extra children. From her story it became clear that the kinship network was seen as a positive part of family life and family cohesion. This refers specifically to the norm of providing assistance to relatives and their children.
- From this viewpoint marriage and family life cannot be separated from the kinship network. Thus relatives formed part of an important support system although this system may put pressure on individual families. During

emergencies, in particular, they were assured that relatives would provide assistance.

- However, the discussions also revealed a **negative side**. One example is the case of a young professional woman in the Western Cape who was opposed to the "tradition" by which her husband was expected to assist his parents financially. She would have preferred to apply both her salary and his for the benefit of their own (nuclear) family and children. Another respondent pointed out that *lobola* represented the fulfilment of the financial responsibility of her husband and his family, and that this brought about a reciprocal responsibility **towards** her husband's family. A youth group in the Orange Free State discussed this from both the positive and the negative sides and reached the conclusion that the norm still existed, but that it was becoming less prescriptive and often functioned on a more voluntary basis and according to the means of the various parties.
- From a list of factors that contribute to divorce, as they emerged from the discussions, it was apparent that what used to be a strength, was now regarded by many young people as a burden. For many women "staying with the in-laws" was perceived to be a problem since it was regarded as a reason for the disintegration of family life.

Once again **ambivalence** was apparent (apart from the pronounced strengths and weaknesses). On the one hand, some respondents acknowledged that involvement with the kinship network was functional. On the other hand, they resented it that relatives, and in-laws in particular, assumed a "right" to interfere in family life.

Social change and the destructive force of certain socio-political factors were often perceived to contribute to an increase in divorce, desertion and family disintegration. This was related to the decline in traditional family and community life, in other words a decline of the strengths as discussed previously.

At present there are no statistical data on the divorce rate of black South Africans. Nevertheless the respondents generally accepted that an increase in the divorce rate threatened family life. Various factors that contribute towards family disintegration on a societal level were identified. A weakening of the relationships between husband and wife and between children and parents was discussed.

2.5 Decline in values and norms which support the marital relationship

All three generations linked the "ideal" marital relationship to love, respect, trust and responsibility. These "building blocks" were clearly formulated in a discussion

of the traditional system. Its decline was blamed on social change (modernisation) and the pressure of the dominant culture in the historical and contemporary socio-political system. A member of a youth group in the Western Cape summarised the "disintegration" of family life as follows:

> *I think in the present days there is no respect.*
>
> *Today the mother is working and bringing in more money than the father does. Therefore she ends up not respecting the father.*
>
> *Mothers are today not taking their responsibilities at home. Unlike the olden days where the father was the breadwinner (sic) and the mother was responsible for bringing up children and looking after the home.*

Once again certain strengths and weaknesses can be identified.

- On the **positive** side, the "ideal" marital relationship was seen as one where the husband/father was recognised as head of the family or household. This was the traditional situation and as such it contributed towards happiness and the cohesion of the family.

A rural grandfather expressed the experience of men as follows:

> *Traditionally they are the head. Women expect good education and careers and earn more than men. Men feel threatened in their manhood and want to compensate with drink, women and sport.*

- The older generation based the marital relationship on respect and authority. According to them this kept families together and made families the basic building blocks of community life.
- A professional female in Cape Town was asked about the disintegration of marriage and family life. She thought that the cause was that the husband/father was no longer the "head of the house".
- The following remark was made at a work seminar in a rural area:

> *The time has come that fathers must learn how to be a husband and a father - they have had no experience, no role models.*

The respondents were not all in agreement on this issue. The decline in male authority was often seen as a problem or a **negative factor.**

- Women had mixed feelings about the support received from men in creating healthy family lives and in raising children. This emerged from most discussions and manifested itself in varying degrees. The following quotation reflects the feeling:

I do not like men because I learned a lesson at first. Husbands take all the money and go and waste it and they do not support the children. They have girlfriends and they do not care whether you have food for the children at home or not. I tried again with another man and it was the same and I think it is a very difficult thing to have a husband. I am now prepared to stay alone with my children and I think it will be better for me.

- The emancipation of women was one "modern" phenomenon which was often related to increasing marital friction and divorce. It was also discussed in the context of conflicting cultures and the higher educational achievements of women, particularly in youth groups.
- Socio-political factors were blamed for the decline of the norm that the "father is the head of the household", and this decline was presumably responsible for the disintegration of and deviance in the marital relationship. This was the case for all three of the generations, and for youth groups in particular. Contract labour and the housing of workers in single quarters (which brought about long periods of separation from their families) topped the list. This separation from families brought about a decline in the traditional authority of and respect for fathers. The lack of involvement of fathers was perceived to be the death knell of meaningful marriage and family life. This was illustrated and convincingly argued in all group discussions. Migratory labour and forced resettlement of people with concomitant poverty and sadly deficient housing made a mockery of the concept of the family as "the cornerstone of a society".
- It is understandable that particularly the groups consisting of grandparents were concerned that "African family life" was irrevocably lost. This concern was based on so-called "modernisation and liberalisation" seen against the backdrop of a socio-political era in which the "mother-centred families" could also be regarded as one of the key elements of survival.

The above-mentioned socio-political causes could also be discussed under a separate heading, but in the present context it could be stated that a previously important factor (the strong father figure with authority) disintegrated and this brought a vulnerability to marriage and family relationships. This, at least, is what emerged from transcriptions of the group discussions. It could not be determined whether this would still be the case when, in future, structural limitations may have disappeared.

The decline in paternal authority ("the position of the man as head of the household") and the disintegration of the "traditional marital relationship", both of which were experienced as cohesive forces in family life, are reflected in the following quotations from discussions:

- *There is no evidence of respect between adults and between adults and children in a four-roomed house where twelve or more people have to find a spot to sleep. If you hear that a daughter spends the night "out" you say: "Thank heavens, one sleeper less in an already overcrowded house."*
- *Child delinquency and prostitution are also important. Sometimes parents are aware of the fact that some of the money brought home comes from these sources, but no one is inclined to ask questions or reprimand another if there is at least food for the next meal.*
- *The order of the day is very often school drop-outs, who steal for survival because prison conditions may be far better than "back home".*

The views about norms and values which guide the marital relationship, can be summarised by noting that marriage was experienced as a cohesive factor, for the elderly in particular. In this sense it was seen as a strength. Against the background of social change as forced socio-political change there was ambivalence as to whether this should still be the norm.

From the data it appears that there was a realisation that adjustments about norms governing the husband-wife relationship were essential in a changing social reality. This also applied to the parent-child relationship.

2.6 Changing norms about the parent-child relationship

We need families, families need children.

- These were the words of an aged participant in a work seminar in the Eastern Cape. They express one of the basic "strengths" in the family life of black South Africans: children are very important and are highly valued. This is the reason for the commitment and readiness to sacrifice for the sake of children, in other words for the sake of "the family" as an institution.
- Another grandfather from rural Natal said that one only really became human when one had children.
- The researcher was frequently struck by the premium placed on children, as mentioned above, combined with a commitment to education in order to improve the living conditions of the next generation. Grandparents and parents were prepared to neglect themselves for the sake of the children in their charge.

Against this background it should be clear why the relationship between children and parents (or grandparents) received considerable attention in group discussions involving all three generations. This issue will receive more attention in the next chapter, where parental authority is discussed.

The following facets, which can be classified as problems regarding the norms and values of family life, emerged from group discussions:

2.6.1 Grandparent-grandchild relationships

Because so many grandparents acted as primary care-givers of grandchildren, they were included in the group discussions. It was particularly noticeable in rural areas how keen grandparents (grandmothers especially) were to discuss their problems with regard to the care of children. This is seen as a **strong positive** aspect. Three main **"problems"** emerged:

- Poverty and an accompanying lack of adequate housing and quality of life were prevalent. Often the only source of income that grandparents had was their old-age pensions. This was the case in rural areas in particular, but it also applied to many urban grandparents. Biological parents seldom contributed to the maintenance of their children, so that the physical-financial care of grandchildren constituted a heavy burden for the grandparents. The personal relationships between grandchildren and grandparents were particularly problematical under these circumstances. The commitment of grandmothers, in particular, should therefore be seen as a very strong factor.
- A further concern for grandparents (and parents) was the "control" of children. The experience of parents and grandparents who felt that children no longer respected their authority will be discussed in the following chapter. Coming from a tradition in which authority was one of the main pillars of community life, grandparents considered the youths' fundamental questioning of the moral authority of older generations to be decadent. A grandmother formulated it as follows: "How do you talk to children who are still at school but get themselves drunk and throw rocks?" This situation was interpreted as a weakness in the parent-child relationship, in other words in primary socialisation.

  The "gap" between the grandparents and the children who had to be raised was given various names. Apart from the clichéd "generation gap" it was also referred to as a "communication gap" or "educational gap". The parent-child relationship was viewed as a negative factor but can be seen as a strength in the sense that grandparents took responsibility under difficult circumstances.

  The children who were cared for by grandparents complained that they did not find their grandparents accessible to discuss their experiences at school, or fashions, modern customs, or the political situation in the country. On the other hand, the grandparents complained that the attitudes of the children amounted to the following: "You cannot teach us anything because you are illiterate or have

little experience of school or education." Although the "gap" was viewed as a weakness by the older generation, from the point of view of the grandchildren this focus on meaningful communication to bridge the "gap" would represent a strength in family life.

- It also became clear from the discussions that the grandparents received little or no support from welfare organisations, or from adult guidance or educational institutions. The grandparents expressed a need for and a willingness to utilise supportive and parental programmes.

The above discussion is an example of how difficult it is to interpret the data in terms of strengths, weaknesses or ambivalence. What is clear is that ambiguities may occur, depending on the point of reference (i.e. generation, gender or age) and the same person may experience ambivalence about various important facets of family life.

2.6.2 Parent-child relationships

Remarks about the relationship between children and grandparents are generally also valid for relationships between children and their biological parents. The following trends emerged from the data.

- Youth groups generally appreciated the educational problems experienced by their parents. A youth group in Soweto spent the entire discussion on the fact that 1976 could be seen as a "watershed" year in the questioning of parental moral authority. It was in this context that the generation gap seemed particularly relevant. A mother expressed it succinctly as follows: "When my child starts talking about 'freedom charters' we do not know how to continue the discussion."

From the point of view of the children, the strength lay in an appeal for more communication between parents and children, an awareness of their own political consciousness and a sensitivity about the inability of parents and grandparents to understand the heightened political awareness among their children. From the point of view of parents this attitude was seen as a problem which caused much anxiety about the future of the youth and of parenthood. One could almost conclude that the so-called communication gap was experienced as a weak link in family life, also by the youth.

- The absence and lack of involvement of fathers in the socialisation of children were frequently mentioned. A group of students in the Northern Transvaal tried to link the communication gap between fathers and children to the norm of the unquestionable authority of the father as head of the household. Father absence

was pursued in a subsequent group discussion with the parents. They came to the conclusion that the normative position of authority of the father created distance between him and the children. Father absence was seen as part of a tradition which places the mother as a mediator between the father and the child. This has relevance for programme development. Within the present context father absence is seen as a weakness in parent-child relationships.

- Groups in working-class areas frequently referred to the bad example set by parents who abused alcohol and were guilty of marital infidelity. This was again related to respect and authority: children lost their respect for their parents and consequently parents no longer had authority over their children. Thus the family lost its socialisation function.
- A poor image of black fathers in the minds of their wives and children was noticeable in most group discussions. This can be seen as a weakness in family life, but the acceptance of the importance of a father figure in the family can be interpreted in a more positive light. This can be utilised as a point of strength in developing family programmes.

The previous comments about the educational relationship are supported by data on sexual norms and values.

2.7 Normative regulation of sexuality

Data from the transcriptions of discussions and work seminars alone could have taken up a full report, but will here be analysed mainly in terms of the "decline" of norms against premarital sexual intercourse, against premarital and teenage pregnancies and against single-parent relationships comprised of mothers and children only.

2.7.1 Pre- and extramarital intercourse

Groups of grandparents (mainly consisting of grandmothers) were extremely concerned about the "moral decline" of the youth. Long discussions and explanations about the traditional norm of virginity repeatedly led to the conclusion that the norm had disappeared and was, at best, only articulated in religious circles.

A rural Natal grandmother expressed it as follows:

As a parent I will practise my own way and teach my child in my traditional way of checking virginity. But she will be a fool to her friends and they will say her mother is old fashioned to check (and protect?) her virginity, and they are clever because they go to family planning clinics for prevention. The evil is going on with children.

The fear of grandmothers and mothers has shifted away from the traditional concern with virginity to a fear of teenage or premarital pregnancies.

Using strengths and weaknesses as a framework for interpretation, it can at most be stated that there is a decline of the norm of premarital virginity. In the sense that it signals a decline in parental normative control, it may be a poor link in the experience of parenthood and as such it creates concern. The younger generations did not experience this norm as meaningful control that influenced the quality of family life fundamentally. They acknowledged that young people and teenagers started becoming sexually active and started experimenting with sex during their school years.

2.7.2 Teenage pregnancies

A strong feeling that teenage pregnancies were getting out of control was apparent in parent and grandparent groups. This was seen to result in crises in family life. Since parents and grandparents often had very high expectations that their children would be able to improve their opportunities and quality of life through education, a pregnancy which ended a school career was considered a disaster. There were differences of opinion as to whether a schoolgirl who fell pregnant should be allowed to return to school after giving birth. Some participants felt that such a girl would be a bad influence on other children. In some cases it had become almost customary for such a young mother to leave the baby with her parents or relatives and to return to school. In poor communities this merely implied "more mouths to feed".

Youth groups agreed that teenage pregnancies caused problems for families. Inadequate sex education and the absence of recreational facilities were mentioned as causes for early sexual activity and potential pregnancy. Youths in one Cape group complained about the traditional prohibition on bringing friends of the opposite sex "home". Parents and grandparents confirmed that this was simply not allowed. The youth argued that this rule meant that friends of the opposite sex met "in the field or in the bushes", a practice that paved the way for sexual experimentation.

Frequent mention was also made of the effects which poor housing, overcrowded conditions and the lack of privacy had on sexual experimentation.

2.7.3 Family planning

Family planning programmes and clinics where contraceptives can be obtained, were often discussed at length when the topic of teenage pregnancies and illegitimacy was an issue.

Parents and grandparents were clearly ambivalent about the use of contraceptives. They feared that girls would fall pregnant in a climate of moral decay and a culture of "sex is fun"; they felt that men would not take responsibility for such pregnancies. Mothers and grandmothers also felt that if they took their daughters to the clinic, it signalled (tacit) consent for young people to "sleep around". Thus the theme of sex education was highlighted within the framework of underlying norms and values regarding marriage and family life, and will be discussed in greater detail in the chapter on parenting styles (Chapter 4).

Youth and parent groups often raised the concept of proof of fertility. Older people doubted that this norm ever really existed and, according to them, younger people used it as an excuse for "illegitimate" children.

The arguments about teenage pregnancies and illegitimate children were summarised in the following way at one of the work seminars:

> *Culturally, blacks do not condone teenage pregnancy but they do become involved as a family. The young mother is kept within the family. The mother being responsible for her care and that of her baby, she provides essential continuing support of her daughter, assisting her to cope and to accept the reality and problems accompanying early motherhood. The father and other members of the family also play an important part in the life of the new mother and her child, as at this time all she needs is empathy to build her confidence and ability to cope with her new roles and thus ensuring a smooth return to normal family life again.*

Within the theme of values and norms about family life, the weaknesses involved the following norms and values:

- The decline of normative control over "virginity" was experienced by the grandparents as a lowering of the quality of marital life. Parents often saw this within the broader context of "control".
- Rather than being a general source of concern, the change referred to above led to a specific concern about pregnancies.
- A further weakness resulting from teenage pregnancies (often mentioned at the group discussions between parents and grandparents) was the inadequacy of education, which implied poor preparation for the future, and poverty in the sense of more children who had to be cared for by parents and grandparents.

Very few strengths emerged:

- In some group discussions with youths, the opinion was expressed that the older generations should be aware of the "modern sexual revolution" and that this indicated the need for better communication between parents and children.

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- Young people of both sexes felt that the traditional prohibition on visits between friends of the opposite sex should be reconsidered. Such communication between the youths of opposite sexes should be seen as a strength.

Ambivalence about family planning was also evident. On the one hand, family planning was seen as a strength in preventing teenage pregnancies which could impact negatively on the quality of family life. On the other hand, there was uncertainty on whether or not it encouraged sexual activity amongst youngsters, and marital infidelity amongst adults. In that sense it would be seen as a weakness.

2.8 Conclusions

The data obtained in this research fail to substantiate the conclusion/interpretation that the family is becoming obsolete. Instead, the data coincide with the conclusions of Don Edgar (1991) based on a study undertaken in Australia in 1984.

> *In the Australian Value Study (1984) the two goals most frequently chosen by Australians as the most important in their lives were security ("making certain all basic needs and expenses are provided for") and family life ("a life centered on my family").*

Time and again the importance of family life was emphasised and equally often it was situated within specific norms and values. This not only indicates the relevance of this research project, but also validates the inclusion of a section on norms and values.

Reference has already been made to the difficulty of limiting the discussion to a rigid categorisation in terms of either strengths or weaknesses. When attempting to summarise the discussion under these headings, the ambiguities and ambivalences occurring over various generations and genders should be borne in mind.

2.8.1 Strengths of values and norms about family life

- The **considerable importance** attached to children, family life and family ties was evident in virtually every conversation and group discussion.
- The fact that so many families appeared healthy and fulfilled, despite the socio-political situation, is evidence of the vitality and the potential for survival of the family life of black South Africans. This is a sound basis for developing goal-orientated programmes to empower people and families.
- Data support the conclusion that this vitality and potential for survival are strengths in the family life of black South Africans, despite the decline and disintegration which are also evident.

- Certain institutions and customs such as polygamy and *lobola* were seen as strengths in countering divorce and marital disintegration. This is true for all the generations, but holds for the older generation in particular.
- Relationships within the kinship network were experienced as a strength in supporting family members and therefore family life.
- Some respondents considered the presence of a male or father figure as "head" of the family to be a strength. This applied both to the marital relationship and to the parent-child and grandparent-grandchild relationships.
- Traditional norms about the control of sexuality were seen by grandparents as a very important cohesive force in family life.

There was debate about all the above strengths. Those differences which were identified could be blamed on social change in general, and socio-political circumstances in particular.

2.8.2 Weaknesses or negative factors related to norms and values

Seen from a socio-political perspective, structural pressure exerted on the family lives of black South Africans included factors ("weaknesses") such as poverty, poor housing and the unfair resettlement and degradation of people. This should be addressed during the process of restructuring in a democratic and fair society.

- Divorce and consequent family disintegration were a source of concern for virtually all the respondents.
- Members of the older generation blamed the disintegration of the family on the decline of traditional institutions and customs.
- Concern was expressed about the decline of the family life of black South Africans. This was done explicitly and implicitly in all discussions, and the older generations, in particular, found it hard to discuss changes in traditional values and norms in any other than extremely negative terms.

2.8.3 Conclusions concerning the planning of programmes for rebuilding families

Whenever strengths and weaknesses were compared with a view to developing future programmes, there was always a sense of hope based on a general commitment to the family or household as an institution.

- Part of the insight which was gained from this method of collecting information emphasised that changes in behaviour take place more rapidly than changes in norms.

In new and changing circumstances certain adjustments need to be made to the traditional customs. This is reminiscent of Berardo's words (1990:809) in the quotation at the beginning of Chapter 1, namely that the survival of the family throughout the ages is due to the "chameleonlike ability" of the family as an institution. Berardo's emphasis also applies:

> *It is during periods of rapid and extensive social change that this resilient character of families is particularly tested.*

- Different viewpoints and problems are acknowledged by women and men on the one hand, and by the youth on the other, and will have to be taken into account in the construction of families. These different viewpoints form part of a changing reality. Changes in the roles of and power relationships between marital partners, and between parents and children form part of a world-wide phenomenon and are not limited to the process of adjustment experienced by black South Africans.
- The main conclusion regarding the norms and values of/in family life is that there is a realisation of the conflict between family values and development values. This conflict is approached in a creative way, which need not comply with an acceptance of either the dominant culture or with fundamental traditionalism.
- The words of the locally-based authors Burman and Reynolds (1986:3) constitute an apt summary to this chapter:

> *The family in its various forms is still the main agent of socialization in South Africa.*

CHAPTER 3

NATURE AND EXPERIENCE OF THE DECLINE OF PARENTAL AUTHORITY

> *All of these conceptions of parental values have a common theme - they all emphasize a contrast between parents who are more likely to prefer autonomous or self-initiating behavior in their children and those more likely to prefer conformity or obedience to traditional family and institutionalized norms for behavior* (Alwin 1984:363).

3.1 Introduction

Against the background of the previous chapter which dealt with values and norms basic to family life, the above quotation is clearly relevant. From an analysis of the data it soon became clear that respect and authority (which in people's minds appear to be interchangeable) were fundamental concepts in the traditional culture of black South Africans, in the sense that they constituted the foundation of thought not only on family life, but on community life in general.

During the pilot study it was noticeable that when people were asked what "troubled (them) most about family life", their first response was brief yet firm: "The decline of parental authority". When prompted to elaborate on the nature of authority, the latter was associated with a respect for parents and elders as superiors.

Epke (1983:485) takes the discussion one step further when he views the ancestral cult as the basis for solidarity and the acceptance of and submission to authority.

There is a further link between parental authority and the study of Alwin, from which the previous quotation was taken, namely that this area of research also falls within the framework of social change (either the so-called process of modernisation or the structural "face" of socio-political reality in South Africa). For Alwin "change in time" meant a shift in emphasis from obedience to autonomy, while in the present research, this was often seen in the context of "the family in transition". Against this background, the data on the decline of parental authority in the family life of black South Africans can be analysed within the broader framework of strengths and weaknesses (or opportunities for creative redefinition, as explained in the previous chapter).

3.2 Defining power and authority within the context of the study

The analysis of data on parental authority in the sociology of the family, on power (often narrowed to marital power) and on the operationalisation and measurement of these variables in particular, has a history which extends over several decades (Kranichfeld 1987:42).

To employ a Weberian distinction between power and authority, social power is generally regarded as the potential of one person to forcibly change another. Authority is conceptualised as legitimate power. This distinction is useful in the present study, since literature on the sociology of the family gives a dimension of "culturally legitimated power associated with specific social positions" (Sprey *in* Cromwell & Olson 1975:69). This power is in other words concerned with legitimate power invested in a particular role, in this case the parental role and particularly that of the "father-as-head-of-the-family". The analytical distinction between power and authority made it possible during group discussions to compare ascribed status and achieved status. This could serve to indicate a change in emphasis that both older and younger generations attached to the meaning of parental authority.

In a sense it was not necessary to define the meaning of "parental authority" during the original discussions, since family life was experienced in terms of this basic concept. This applied to older generations in particular. Instead, an attempt was made during the initial discussions to provide opportunities for participants to explain the meaning they themselves attached to this concept. Parents and grandparents who felt lost in the new or developing situation where parental authority was absent, were asked to try to formulate indicators of how they "measure" the decline in parental authority. This technique was also employed in discussions with youth groups and in the work seminars which included members of all three generations. In this way it was possible to compare the way parental authority was defined by different generations.

Different groups were also given the opportunity to compare their own views with those of others. The data show clearly that the respondents associated parental authority with respect and obedience. It is this aspect which will be emphasised when the findings on the decline of parental authority are discussed. Parents, and especially grandparents, interpreted the decline of parental authority as disobedience and lack of respect. The decline of parental authority, the lack of respect for elders and the disobedience of children caused feelings of helplessness and confusion. The older generation expressed this as a loss of control over their children. They felt that

respect for older people and parental authority were the basic pillars which supported the traditional socialisation of family values.

The analysis of the data will focus on two aspects: the meanings attached to respect for parents and obedience of children, and the changes (transition) and influence of structural factors, as evidenced by the discussions.

3.3 Respect for parents and obedience of children

The traditional normative system includes respect and obedience. These form part of the socialisation process and are proscribed to children as a reality which is practically "taken-for-granted" within the family and, more specifically, within parent-child relationships. Members of all three generations agreed that authority was culturally legitimated, so that the position of parents (particularly the father) rested on ascribed authority. The rationale was that parents and older people were wiser and also had more experience of life. This allowed them to issue orders that required no explanation, should not be questioned or criticised and should immediately be obeyed, since "children trust their parents".

The younger generation clearly defined and experienced respect and obedience differently. Socio-economic and socio-political factors appeared to be important variables associated with these differences.

3.3.1 Meanings attached to parental authority by the older generations and their arguments around its decline

As indicated previously, respect and authority were linked by the respondents to ancestral worship. This was supported by the thoughts expressed by some respondents. The kinship system was the foundation for respect and brought unity to extended and nuclear families. This unity can be seen as a strength, as indicated by, for instance, a group of students in Soweto and a group of young adolescents in a Natal rural area. In the latter group a fourteen year old boy expressed his understanding of this link as follows: "Ancestors are part of the family and create a feeling of respect towards parents and elders."

The respondents presented the following examples of the decline in respect for the authority of parents:

- Children did not have respect for parents; they were disobedient; they did not listen; they did not obey their parents and thus they had no respect for parental authority.
- Children were no longer refraining from disrespectful behaviour in public.

Specific examples included the following:

In full buses children remain seated while adults have to stand.
Children do not stand up to show respect to elders.
Children conduct loud conversations, which is not "proper" in the presence of older people.
The dress of young people suggest lack of respect towards elders.
They ignore the instructions of parents.

Traditionally, older people were not demonstrative in terms of displaying affection in public. This norm was transmitted to their children and, therefore, the public display of affection by younger people served as an indicator of a rejection of parental authority and as a lack of respect for parents.

A rural Natal grandmother interpreted the fact that young people drank and smoked as a sign of disrespect; particularly the fact that they did so in the presence of parents or older people. To her it meant that parents had lost control of those children who ignored their warnings.

The possible reasons for the decline of parental authority were also investigated during some group discussions. Grandparents, in particular, were conscious of the role of education in the decline of parental authority or respect (or perhaps the credibility of "tradition"). A grandmother from Natal expressed her ideas as follows:

Education is a good thing but the educated children do not respect us as the uneducated children did. In the olden days there were customary rules that were respected. The time has really changed.

Liberal ideas and attitudes of children were also linked to the decline of authority. Education as an institution was blamed for this. A middle-aged member of a group of parents in the Northern Transvaal made an interesting comment about the role of education in undermining parental authority. He stated that the problem was not education as such, but rather the fact that black education, formerly undertaken by missionaries, had been taken over by the apartheid government in 1954. Previously a very good relationship had existed between parents and educators in the missionary schools, and parents had never felt threatened by children with higher educational qualifications than themselves, even by those children who could read and write.

However, group discussions also abounded with success stories of grandparents and parents who spoke with gratification about mutually enriching relationships between parents and children in spite of generation or educational gaps, and often despite poverty and poor housing and other adverse circumstances.

3.3.2 The views of the younger generation on respect and authority

As set out before, it is useful to draw a distinction between ascribed status and achieved status. This seems appropriate, since children started objecting to the fact

that their elders expected respect merely because they were parents, grandparents or educators. According to the youths, respect should be earned or deserved. A group of Std 9 girls stated that "they (the parents) do not want to hear what we have to say". They interpreted this as a lack of respect from the side of the parents. They argued further that they were not regarded as people with opinions of their own, and this denied them their personal rights as individuals.

Other youth groups also extended the concept of respect for one's parents to include the mutual respect between parents and children. In one of the work seminars the view was expressed that, within the concept of mutual respect in a family, the "arguing" of children did not necessarily imply a lack of respect nor a rejection of parental authority.

The theme of respect for parents and the obedience of children was prominent in discussions with youth groups and at work seminars. It was frequently stated that the youth did not necessarily lack respect for their elders, and the participants even objected to the fact that parents generalised about this. The viewpoint of the younger people was that they did respect their parents; it was merely the interpretation of respect and obedience that differed from the traditional definition given by their parents.

From the data it can be concluded that young people were acutely aware of changes in education and living circumstances. Parents could therefore not expect to raise their children in the same way that they had been raised. Differences between the rural and urban environment were also taken to have a bearing on differences in the views of young people and the older generation. The following aspects were emphasised during group discussions with youths (and led to many a debate between younger and older members):

- Young people did not share the views of the older generation that children could be ordered to do or not to do certain things. They also found it unacceptable that the discussion of orders was not permitted. When children ventured to express opinions it was seen as backchatting, disrespect and criticism. Thus, according to members of youth groups, they were unfairly accused of being disrespectful and disobedient.

  During a discussion in the PWV area, a young man formulated his "message" to parents as follows:

  It is not as if we do not respect you, but we have gained knowledge. Let us talk about it and explain it, without your thinking that we consider you to be stupid.

- From the point of view of the youth, education contributed to their different approach to authority in terms of which parents and grandparents were seen as

old fashioned. This perception resulted in attitudes that ranged from appreciation for, to impatience with their parents and grandparents.

- A group of Std 9 girls, who were being raised by either their parents or their grandparents, complained that the grandparents "always" compared things with what they perceived to be the "good old days". According to this group they would have liked to discuss those issues that they regarded as important, such as school and country matters as well as contemporary fads, with their parents/ grandparents. They were however not "understood"; parents didn't "want to listen" or did not have the time, or else resorted to stories of the olden days. Young people consequently turned to teachers or peers, since they felt that parents, and grandparents in particular, had an educational backlog.
- Misbehaviour by parents and its effects were mentioned during discussions about mutual respect between parents and children. In this context the question was asked: "How can children respect their parents if ...?" (This question was most often raised by the older generations.)

A group of parents and grandparents in a rural area of Natal emphasised the phenomenon that parents performed "uncivilised" actions in the presence of their children, thereby setting a bad example. They argued that this type of behaviour did not foster respect for parents, since one could not reprimand one's child for something that oneself was guilty of.

Within the same context youngsters referred to discord between parents and to their inconsistent behaviour. These issues made it difficult to respect parents as educators and also implied that parents did not represent role models for behaviour.

- The father figure, or absence of a father as head of the household, was seen as an important factor related to the theme of respect and obedience. It led to interesting debates during work seminars.

The general criticism was that the father in so-called "complete" families was not involved in the socialisation of the children other than acting as a disciplinarian, and even then often without much effect. In this context, reference was made to the traditional role of the father as "head of the house".

Evidence of gender differences was apparent from the fact that girls referred to the "absence" or non-involvement of fathers and their inability to communicate with their children. Boys tended to associate the absence or non-involvement of a father with the concept of respect. This was particularly striking during the discussions with the Sowetan youths referred to above. A male member of the group said the following: "Detachment makes it possible for authority to exist." According to this view a father's ancestral responsibilities implied that it was

functional for him to keep a distance (experienced by the girls as a communication gap). "The father in this way is present and involved in a profound way via the ancestors."

3.4 Respect and obedience in socio-economic perspective

The results of various researchers indicate that parental orientation in the socialisation of children is based on a class distinction (Alwin 1984; Kohn 1963; Luster, Rhoodes & Haas 1989). Kohn (1963) concludes that lower social status renders a person more likely to value conformity to norms or obedience. The higher the social status of parents, the more appreciation they have for characteristics indicative of self-guidance or autonomy.

There were many discussions about disobedience, "lack of respect for parents" and a negation of "traditional" values during group discussions with grandparent groups in particular. In these groups (where education and income were indicative of a lower social status) mention was continually made of obedience, lack of respect for elders and a disregard for traditional values.

On the other hand, transcriptions of discussions with experts and "mixed" audiences in work seminars suggest that there were some indications of a transition towards more emphasis on guidance and autonomy. The latter seemed particularly prominent during discussions with professionals and more highly educated youths.

Obviously it is not possible to generalise about the class position of respondents in the present study. Furthermore, no studies could be traced which investigated the transition of the socialisation values of respect and obedience to autonomy and self-guidance. Nevertheless, the greater appreciation for autonomy rather than conformity and obedience placed those views which considered the "decline of parental authority" as a crisis or weakness in the lives of black South Africans in a broader global context. Cognisance of this fact could contribute to the development of programmes.

Education is clearly an important issue because it teaches people to think independently and to have a critical approach to their environment. In Paragraph 3.3.2 reference was made to the views of some Std 9 girls who did not want to be inundated with stories from the past and did not want to receive numerous instructions from their parents. They would have preferred to "discuss" matters and to share what they had learnt at school.

A group of professionals mentioned a Zulu saying that a father could not be friends with his children. When asked whether greater friendship between a father and his children would imply less parental respect, the overwhelming response was

negative. One of these responses illustrates a shift from obedience towards autonomy:

> *In the proverb repression and fear are implied. On the other hand authority which is liberal, sympathetic, showing love, patience and room for personal opinion, gives rise to natural and genuine respect which is called discipline (acceptance of authority).*

In addition to education, religion probably also played a significant role in emphasising respect and obedience. A discussion of this issue follows.

3.5 Role of religion in the decline of parental authority

Group discussions, with grandparents in particular, often returned to the subject of religion as a strength in terms of sustaining a "healthy" family life. Norms and values were frequently derived from the Bible. Teachings from the Bible were also quoted with reference to parental authority and the norms that children should obey and respect their parents.

A group of youth leaders, still young themselves, but all having received a higher education and involved with religious work amongst young people, appeared ambivalent. On the one hand, they emphasised obedience but, on the other hand, they also appeared to be aware of their growing autonomy. A male member linked this growing autonomy to parents' insistence on obedience and persistence in keeping up traditions: "One often experiences tension, because the 'tradition' taught to you by your parent dictates one thing and perhaps you want to do it, but then conflicts with what the Bible and education teaches."

3.6 Decline of parental authority in socio-political context

In accordance with the basic assumptions as set out in the first chapter, the decline of parental authority should also be considered against the socio-political background of South Africa. One of the characteristics of the present political situation is that since 1976 the youth have been playing a pivotal role in the struggle for freedom and the demand for universal political rights in most of the delimited black neighbourhoods. In most of the townships youth or student organisations have been involved in confrontation with local and central authorities. Some parents feel that their children, under the pressure of youth organisations, have turned into a force which threatens traditional (i.e. orderly) family life.

Seen from the youths' perspective, their increased political awareness rendered the moral authority of their parents unacceptable, or at least profoundly ques-

tionable. Previous generations were blamed for having had no real impact on the struggle against apartheid. This tone was clearly articulated in a discussion among social workers in the Cape Peninsula area:

> *You* (the parents and previous generations) *have had your chance to destroy apartheid and you have done nothing! Why is it that you tolerated the oppression of our people for generations?*

A group of students in Soweto reached the conclusion that, in the final analysis, the problems surrounding the family life of black South Africans could be reduced to a political problem.

The above statements reflect the feeling that apartheid amounted to a denial of political rights to the majority of people in the country, and therefore to a minimisation of their opportunities in life. Other structural factors which are related to the socio-political situation have impacted negatively and disruptively on family life. Poverty tops the list of external or structural factors which contributed to family disruption and disorganisation.

3.6.1 The role of poverty as a factor in the decline of parental authority

The relationship between chronic poverty and related factors on the one hand, and the disorganisation of the family on the other hand, is widely acknowledged. McLoyd (1990:312) developed an analytical model for the influence of poverty and economic loss on parenthood among black Americans. His first facet serves as a point of departure for interpreting the experience of poverty as a weakness in the family life of black South Africans.

> *Its (the model's) principal assumptions are that*
> *(a) poverty and economic loss diminish the capacity for supportive, consistent, and involved parenting;*
> *(b) poverty means an excess of negative life events, undesirable chronic conditions, and the absence and disruption of marital bonds ...*

As a result of situating the youth in a socio-political context, it could be argued that politically sophisticated youths in liberation movements, as well as through parents and the older generation in general, started to realise that poverty was also the result of class differences and that under apartheid in South Africa class and race often went hand in hand. There was a growing "belief" among certain youths that, in order to break out of the cycle of poverty, the "system" needed to be destroyed. Older generations were often sceptical about the visions of the youth, especially against the background of the very violent South African society.

On a more concrete level, poverty was frequently mentioned as one of the most important destructive forces in family life. Its link to unemployment and poor housing was often cited. A youth group in Soweto came to the conclusion that poverty and poor community life, which were characteristic of the nineteen seventies and nineteen eighties, made parents vulnerable. According to them poverty made true family reconstruction impossible.

Poverty and family life were approached from many different angles. The following more general aspects were emphasised:

- The disintegrating effect of migratory labour on family life and the concomitant creation of poverty were mentioned in virtually every group discussion and work seminar. Even though discriminatory legislation had been repealed, the results (including poverty and hardship) would be experienced for generations to come. Migratory labour was also at the root of the absence of fathers and their lack of involvement, both factors that have already been discussed as disrupting influences on respect and discipline in the family.

  At group discussions in the Orange Free State, poverty was related to poor parental authority and child prostitution. The participants frequently felt that parenthood often did not materialise, since both parents had to work and children were left to cope on their own as child care could not be afforded. A grandfather referred to "trees which are planted and have to grow by themselves".

  Structural factors also contributed to the disintegration of family life. These included the long distances that people had to travel to cities and towns, which was caused by former legislation on separate housing areas. Youths complained that parents did not have the time to spend with their children, or to take an interest in their education, for example by attending parent-teacher meetings.

  The demoralising effect of chronic poverty on family life is also illustrated by the following comments made during a work seminar:

  Who can laugh when you are poor?
  Poor families cannot pay attention to children.
  Poverty is carried over to children.

- The role of poverty in family disputes was a recurrent theme, particularly in female groups. Reference was made to alcohol abuse, crime and prostitution, both as causes and effects in the cycle of poverty. Women felt that they bore the prime responsibility for the survival of families. Children referred to friction between their parents due to poor economic circumstances at home.

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3.6.2 Poor housing as a factor in the decline of parental authority

In the socio-political context the role of housing in destroying respect and consideration was mentioned as frequently as the role of poverty. There appeared to be no alternative than to blame the extremely poor housing situation on, *inter alia*, apartheid legislation which brought about group areas, influx control to prevent the families of urban labourers from urbanising and the large-scale uprooting and resettlement of people. These factors were mentioned time and again by members of all three generations, and also in work seminars.

This aspect was raised in virtually every discussion on the decline of parental authority, specifically in connection with esteem and respect.

The following facets were emphasised:

- Social workers in particular frequently posed the following question:

  How can you speak of respect for parents and of parenting per se when you have families of up to twelve and even more people of both sexes, and (reaching/ extending) across two or three generations, sharing a four-roomed dwelling? (group of experts in the Cape Peninsula).

- Youth groups also often linked poor housing to the breakdown of their respect for their parents, and to the respect of family members for one another. The group of schoolgirls mentioned above tried to "unravel" the norm about separation between the sexes and different generations, but were thwarted by the contradictory reality of one-bedroomed houses shared by parents and children of both sexes (and sometimes even by a few other occupants).

  According to them, the older children often slept in the kitchen or living room and the younger children shared a room with their parents. Obviously, lack of privacy was a problem. Parents argued or disagreed in the presence of their children, and did not have sexual privacy. The question naturally arose: who can talk about respect under these circumstances?

- Participants in group discussions often referred to opposing black and white cultures. In non-racial schools children befriended white middle-class children. They became acutely aware of differences in circumstances and in the quality of life.

  An elderly man referred to the positive effect that children's pride in their homes could have, but indicated that this was impossible for the majority of children in black neighbourhoods.

Looking back at our history:
Home was the best thing -
it all started from there -
every child would be happy to go home -
new laws move people -
parents did not have money or time for well constructed homes -
no welcome -
no pride -
no privacy.

Poverty and poor housing within the socio-political situation were prominent in the discussions. An analysis of the transcriptions also reveals references to social change from the "traditional" to the "modern". The decline in parental authority was also linked to this change, and this will be discussed under a separate heading.

3.7 Social change as a factor in the decline of parental authority

With regard to social change one is reminded of the words of Ferraroti (1973) as quoted in the preface to this report. In this quotation reference was made to the ability of families to absorb change and to adapt to changing circumstances and to the fact that this implies a strategy for survival (*cf.* Chapter 1). All the participants in the group discussions, and particularly the parents and grandparents, often referred to these changes in the context of the "family in transition". One could argue that, apart from forced changes in family life due to socio-political realities, more general social change has occurred. This amounts to transition stages in the development or urbanisation of communities which had an effect on parental authority.

The idea of "families which are in a stage of transition" has almost become a cliché; at times one had the impression that it was presented as a "prelude" to ideas without being accompanied by a clear perception of the real meaning. During some of the discussions the respondents were asked to give "content" to this expression. The views of Burgess and Locke (1945) provide a handy explanation. They attempted to explain social change in American families, between the two world wars in particular, in terms of a transition from an "institution" to "companionship". This view focuses on the internal "adaptation" of families to a rapidly changing reality. Cheal (1991:144) gives an apt summary:

> *In the past, they thought, a stable and secure family life was guaranteed by external pressures of law and custom and public opinion. These controls were reinforced inside the family by the authority of the male family head, the rigid*

discipline exercised by parents over their children, and elaborate private and public rituals. That system of control, they argued, had broken down ...

Burgess and Locke (1945 - quoted in Cheal 1991) referred to the result of the external and internal changes as family disorganisation, in other words a situation characterised by insecurities regarding existing values and norms, flexible and changing behaviour in family context and a disintegration of family relationships.

Against the background of social change it is often stated that the value of the individual transcends that of the family in so-called developed countries, in other words a spirit of individualism exists.

An analysis of the way in which the expression "family in transition" was explained during group discussions, reveals two aspects:

- a transition from a "traditional" to a modern or western lifestyle; and
- a transition from rural circumstances and lifestyles to an industrialised-urbanised way of life.

This distinction was less prevalent among grandparent groups. For them the two "types" of transition were linked and signified a decline of the traditional lifestyle.

3.7.1 The effect of the transition from a traditional to a western style of life on the decline of parental authority

A group of grandparents attached the following meanings to transition:

Tradition no longer has power over people.
No tradition
... but not a fully westernised way of life.

The argument was usually that parents and grandparents in traditional communities had authority (ascribed authority due to their position). This was manifested by the way in which parents and older people were addressed. One grandfather referred to the fact that youngsters who followed western (white) culture deviated from the traditional respectful way of addressing parents and older people, and started calling people by their first names. To him this indicated a transition from a traditional to a western way of life.

Another grandfather saw the increasing individualism as an indicator of a transition to a western way of life. He spoke about the "extension" of parents in traditional communities, where all of the parents acted as parent for all of the children. If, for example, an older person saw a child misbehaving, it was expected of him/her to punish the child and scold the child as if it were his/her biological child. This grandfather aptly pointed out that if this were to happen in the modern western

context, it would be regarded as undesirable meddling in the family life of someone else. It would even be possible to take such a person to court. This clearly signifies a decline of parental authority.

3.7.2 The effect of the transition from a rural to an urban environment on the decline of parental authority

During group discussions social change was linked to a change from a rural to an urban way of life. Youth groups and groups of experts, in particular, saw social change as a change from a rural to an urban-industrialised way of life. A professional participant made the following comment: "It seems to me that parents from rural areas cannot cope in a more diversified urban life."

Within this context the authority of parents and elders was seen in relation to the kinship network and extended family which provided more support for the socialisation of children. In the chapter on parenting styles this will be discussed in more depth. Essentially parenthood was not practised only by the biological parents of children, as is the case in predominantly nuclear families or modified extended families in urban areas.

Against this background parents experienced a dilemma in that there were no supporting relatives to assist with parenthood and socialisation; moreover, the parents themselves were "absent" due to structural factors and therefore there were no "role models". Children did not regard the role models from rural areas as relevant within the urban environment - they were seen as old fashioned (according to a group of schoolgirls).

The rural way of life, with its supportive kinship network, was therefore seen as positive by parents and particularly by grandparents. Youths in urban areas, on the other hand, experienced it negatively. There were irritated references to the custom of involving uncles and aunts in family disputes.

The transcriptions of discussions about families in transition reveal that different generations attached different meanings to such a transition. A group of experts in the Eastern Cape contextualised the theme within socio-economic class differences. A nurse was somewhat irritated when the concept of families in transition was mentioned repeatedly. Her reaction was the following:

> *I feel transition is a very out-dated term. How long is a transitional phase? What about second and third generation urban families who have never grown up in rural areas or within extended families? On the other hand as far as blacks are concerned you cannot say we have nuclear families in the true sense like white families ...*

Perhaps she noticed a modified extended kinship network or extended family in the townships, as opposed to the so-called isolated nuclear family in the industrialised-urbanised environment. This probably implies less of a polarity in the transition from a rural to an urban environment.

Burgess and Locke (1945 - quoted in Cheal 1991:144) were not pessimistic about the "family in transition". Their work proceeded from a conviction that re-organisation and adjustment followed from the "desires and capacities of individuals to construct meaningful lives for themselves".

3.8 Interpretations and conclusions

When the research was planned as participant research (i.e. the areas to be researched were identified in co-operation with the respondents), one of the most serious problems identified in the family life of black South Africans was the theme of the "decline of parental authority".

From a sociology-of-knowledge perspective, the concern about parental authority can be situated in macro terms against the background of the youth revolutions of the nineteen sixties. As far as black South Africans are concerned, the theme can likewise be explained in socio-historical and socio-political terms. An analysis of the transcriptions has revealed several nuances which enable one to see the theme as more than merely a "weakness" in family life.

Although the "disintegration" of parental authority was originally approached as a problem in family life and consequently identified as a "weakness", the discussions clearly indicated that the interaction between generations on this issue constituted a strength which should be considered in planning future programmes.

In the previous chapter it was concluded that respect and obedience as indicators of authority are basic issues in family values. It is therefore readily understandable that parents experienced a strong sense of loss due to lack of control over the younger generation. If one considers the analyses of the group discussions with youths and experts, however, the picture is not quite so gloomy. It appears that youths and experts redefined and thought about "parental authority", and this creates a positive picture. One can venture to conclude that a clear weakness in family life can be turned into a point of growth in programmes for reconstructing and enriching family life.

Fairly early in the group discussions the respondents were asked to identify indicators for the decline of parental authority, respect and obedience. It was therefore possible to identify subtle differences between older and younger generations. On the one hand, strengths and weaknesses could be noted. On the

other hand, it facilitated interaction and communication between generations in the light of the different ways in which change was interpreted.

In conclusion, strengths, weaknesses and ambiguities, as well as their value for the development of programmes can be summarised as follows:

3.8.1 The decline of parental authority was interpreted by older generations and by experts as the most negative factor in the disintegration of the family life of black South Africans.

According to the parents and grandparents the decline in parental authority and the consequent disintegration of family life were based on the disobedience of the children. Parents experienced this disobedience through the fact that they were unable to control their children. Parents were unable to fulfil their roles as agents of socialisation.

- A decline of parental authority in the sense of a loss of respect for parents was seen to be manifested as follows: children no longer stood up for parents (e.g. in buses), they were loud and participated in inappropriate public discussions in the presence of elderly people; their dress revealed their disrespect; demonstrations of affection were seen in public; finally, they also smoked and drank. All these behaviourial patterns were in conflict with the "tradition" of respect for the authority of older people, which, according to the respondents, formed the basis for healthy family relationships.
- The absence of the father or his lack of involvement as "head of the family" was also seen as a factor contributing to the decline of parental authority.
- Younger people, and experts in particular (older people usually agreed), felt that socio-political factors contributed to weaknesses in parental authority. In this respect reference was made to poverty and migratory labour as factors contributing to the formation of single-parent families; to poor housing and overcrowding; and to the negative effects of "black education".
- The younger generation did not agree with the way in which older generations defined the "decline of parental authority". They felt negative about the fact that their parents and educators expected respect, yet did not show respect towards them (the youngsters). They referred to what they saw as bad examples and to the inability of older people to recognise a new educational reality. This new reality implied that parents and educators should no longer merely educate in terms of traditional customs.

3.8.2 Young people generally did not agree that a decline of parental authority was necessarily indicated by the disobedience, disrespect and unmanageability of the

youth. This disagreeing between parents and children should be interpreted as a strength, since it constituted a "platform" for discussion between parents and children.

- Parents who participated in work seminars which included members of all the generations, demonstrated that they were prepared to listen to the viewpoints of the younger generations. It was particularly informative to see how seriously grandparents took the argument about mutual respect.
- There was frequent reference to "success stories". These dealt with children who respected their parents and who had understanding for the problems of grandparents as socialisation agents. This can be considered as a strength in the programmes.

3.8.3 It was not always possible to draw a clear distinction between "strengths" and "weaknesses". During group discussions the respondents often started with the negative side of an issue, but also recognised that the same theme, viewed from a different angle, could yield a positive interpretation.

- The views on education are an example of several different (conflicting?) interpretations of the same theme. The older generation frequently felt ambivalent about education. On the one hand, they realised its importance in improving the quality of life but, on the other hand, they feared that it provided children with "liberal ideas" that made them "disobedient".
- Likewise, the older generation experienced religion as a strength that guided their responsibility as educators. Other respondents showed signs of experiencing a conflict between tradition and their interpretation of the Bible.
- Another area of ambivalence which was experienced as a problem, was that of the "family in transition": parents expected obedience without questioning, and children wanted to discuss matters and also wanted parents to listen to them.

One can venture an interpretation that it was precisely these different and often conflicting views which made it possible to discuss the decline of parental authority. This in turn could lead to greater understanding between the various generations. If this knowledge is utilised in a skilful manner, it can contribute greatly to family enrichment programmes and the reconstruction of family life.

3.8.4 An analysis of the transcriptions reveals a possible shift for parents from ascribed to achieved status. In effect this means that there was a realisation that respect for parents and the obedience of children could not be taken for granted. The younger generation and professional respondents had a counter claim, namely that

parents should meet their responsibilities towards their children, thus "earning" respect for their authority.

As far as strengths and weaknesses are concerned, the above considerations lead to the conclusion that there is room for the development of understanding between the generations. The fatalistic acceptance by older generations of the decline of (ascribed) parental authority can become a challenge to accept mutual respect and responsibility (achieved authority).

3.8.5 Regarding the role of education, two arguments were apparent. The older generations experienced ambivalence, even disillusionment about the way in which educated children lacked respect for the authority of their less educated parents or care-givers.

On the other hand, there was the argument that respect and obedience, as indicators of parental authority, should be "open" for discussion. By facilitating discussions between children and educators and creating a forum for communication, it would be possible to assist in constituting or reconstituting mutual respect between parents, children and educational institutions. There was a noticeable positive attitude on the part of parents/grandparents towards support programmes on meaningful parenting.

3.8.6 An analysis of the data reveals strong pressure for a re-evaluation of the role of fathers in the socialisation of children within the framework of a redefined parental authority. During group discussions the absence of fathers or their apparent lack of involvement with their families was mentioned time and again. Mothers and wives frequently linked poor male/female relationships to alcohol abuse and the marital infidelity of men.

These problems can be addressed in suitable programmes to help strengthen family ties.

3.8.7 With a view to reconstructing family life, the structural and/or socio-political forces associated with the decline of parental authority should receive priority in the formulation of legislation and policy in the post-apartheid era. In this regard, one cannot overemphasise the responsibilities of local, regional and central authorities - a debt of honour awaits repayment.

3.8.8 It is clear that the concept of "decline of parental authority" as indicator of family disintegration should be dealt with in a "new" manner; in other words a negative issue should be transformed into a positive one. The norm has shifted from

one of blind obedience by children to one of the autonomy of children. This can be successfully employed in the planning of future programmes.

3.8.9 In dealing with social change and the theme of the family in transition (also when applied to parent-child and marital relationships), an informed programme will have to take account of differences in gender, generation and socio-economic status.

CHAPTER 4

PARENTING STYLES AS DIMENSIONS OF PARENTHOOD

Two major parenting dimensions have been consistently identified as important correlates and/or predictors of children's psychosocial functioning; closeness or warmth, on the one hand, and control or monitoring, on the other ... The closeness dimension emphasizes affection, nurturance, and acceptance of the child by the parent. Monitoring emphasizes parental involvement in the child's life, supervision of the child's activities, and firmness in setting controls and limits ... the combination of the two dimensions may provide the optimum parenting pattern ... (Kandel 1990:184).

4.1 Introduction

When aims for the research were determined and areas to be studied were identified, "parenting styles" was formulated as a theme within the general theme of strengths and weaknesses in family life.

The above quotation expresses a conceptual dilemma which was apparent early on in the research process. It soon became apparent during group discussions with all three generations that the concept of "parenting styles" essentially failed to elicit meaningful discussions on strengths and weaknesses in family life. A general analysis of the data leaves the impression that parents, care-givers, youths and professionals had only a limited conscious awareness of parenting and styles of parenting.

This fact begs the question as to whether the concept of "parenting styles" was not perhaps imposed during the explorative and planning phases due to a western social-scientific frame of thought. This implies that parenting styles which were conceptualised within the context of the research, may have been neither useful nor familiar concepts to the respondents.

In planning the research the usual categories of parenting styles (as defined in social-scientific literature) were consciously ignored (these included parenting styles such as authoritarian, permissive, *laissez faire*, democratic or uninvolved). It was hoped that the data would be amenable to categorisation in terms of the above or other clear categories. However, this did not materialise.

Although reference was made to parenting styles during work seminars, and questions were posed on this theme specifically, the transcriptions indicated that the

discussions remained vague and unspecific, and no specific styles of parenting were defined.

Discussions on the previous two themes flowed easily; by contrast, discussions on styles of parenting usually resulted in stories about how children were traditionally raised, and discussion of those structural limitations (based on the socio-political situation) which prohibited successful parenthood. The result was that data had to be carefully scrutinised in order to expose tendencies in parenting styles, or at least to try to pinpoint problem areas. There was also a realisation that it was not appropriate to force the data into categories of parenting styles. In the previous chapter the theme of obedience featured prominently. One could categorise unquestioning obedience as an example of an authoritarian style. Likewise the need for more communication between parents and children could be seen as a movement towards a more democratic or even permissive style of parenting. This would, however, have to remain speculative, since it was also clear from group discussions that parents were often not even present to practise meaningful parenting or to raise their children. Obviously this was due to the fact that one or both parents or care-givers may have been economically active and were often only at home during weekends or they had to leave home for work very early in the morning and returned late at night. In this respect a group of parents (mainly mothers) on the Reef or Witwatersrand reached the conclusion that they knew more about the parenting of the non-black children whom they cared for during the daytime than about their own children. Their own children were in the care of friends or relatives or attended or bunked school, and may have spent a lot of time on the streets.

The preceding conclusion from the data emphasised the relevance of the introductory quotation. A decision was made to refer to dimensions of parenthood or parenting skills rather than styles of parenting when analysing the transcriptions. Apparently, there are hardly any theoretical work or empirical studies on styles of parenting which incorporate these dimensions in the South African context. Although an attempt was made to analyse the data in terms of the two dimensions referred to in the introductory quotation, this was only partially successful.

The subheadings employed in analysing the data should be seen in the context of the previous remarks. They were determined to a large extent by the results, as was the case in previous chapters. Though reluctant to pre-empt the concluding chapter, it may be stated that an analysis of the data left the impression, on the one hand, of the importance of the field of research and, on the other hand, of how much more research is needed in this field in order to develop programmes to support and enrich family life. The importance of parenthood in the development of children (also as future parents) is underlined, but there is also a realisation that parenting and

parenting styles are complex and call for acquired roles that are a great deal more involved than is generally realised; it is not merely a matter of "doing what comes naturally" as popular opinion would have it.

Against this background the analysis of the data can be discussed.

4.2 Emotional warmth and closeness as dimensions of parenthood

An analysis of the data on emotional warmth and closeness as dimensions of the "how" of parenting deals with two issues. On the one hand, information on the relationship between parents, care-givers and children is relevant. On the other hand, the relationship between parents and care-givers forms the "environment" within which socialisation takes place. Data on the relationship between the parental home and the school were also analysed as indicators of a dimension of parenting.

Indicators of warmth and closeness which were dealt with as far as the parent-child relationship was concerned, included: love and acceptance, nurturing, care-giving, support, encouragement and prompting, as well as assistance by parents in the case of personal problems.

A second factor which an analysis of the data showed to be important as a dimension of parenting, was the relationship between mother and father, in other words the marital relationship. It was, for example, found that statements about an unsatisfactory parent-child relationship could be related to marital discord and stress.

A third factor emerging from the data and which was related to emotional warmth, was that of primary socialisation and its relationship with education as an institution. These three factors will now be illustrated with reference to the research findings.

4.2.1 Nurturing parent-child relationships

Participants in group discussions regarded nurturing parent-child relationships (an element of the dimension of emotional warmth) as an important fact of family life, or as a strength. An example is that of a male youth participating in a work seminar in Pretoria who expressed his expectations of a father in terms of "closeness and fairness".

There is a further example which underlined the importance of the creation and continuation of emotional warmth and nurturing as an important dimension of parenting. This was the story told during a work seminar in the Eastern Cape by a father/grandparent, who related how the death of his two sisters left him with seven children to support, while he was still young and unmarried. When his own child

was born, he had to fulfil the role of father for eight children. He saw his most important responsibility as that of developing a trusting relationship with each child, and not favouring his own child. When his children acknowledged him as a fair and caring father, they entrusted their problems to him. In his story he illustrated the importance of a nurturing parent-child relationship.

A twelve year old boy in a place of safety in Natal had the following concise answer to a question on the meaning of the concept of love that parents have for their children:

> *If parents give their children things like toys and books, children feel that their parents love them.*

The data therefore indicate that a nurturing parent-child relationship was an important dimension of parenting. On the other hand, where such a relationship was absent, it was experienced as a weakness in family life.

In this respect a young man from the Northern Transvaal referred, during a work seminar, to what he termed the "secondary neglect of children". His view was that this was common among black people. He described it as a situation where parents were so involved in the material demands of day-to-day living - "taking care of the material things like clothes and food" - that they did not have the time to include nurturing and emotional warmth in the parent-child relationship; children were therefore mostly left to their own devices.

The issue of support and encouragement as part of a nurturing parent-child relationship was also seen as an important factor or strength in family life and parenting. Their absence, however, was experienced as a problem or weakness. A case in point was a group discussion with young students in the Northern Transvaal. A young man referred to the "conditional love" that parents had for children. He expressed it as follows: "If, and only when you perform good academically, then you are good enough - the cream of the family. If you are not good they do not take care of anything." He argued further that parents should set an example of unconditional love. The children would then strive towards the same, and mutual respect and love would be engendered. Group members were obviously in agreement with this exposition of unconditional love which emphasised the importance of praise and encouragement. A young female group member elaborated as follows: "They (parents and/or relatives) only show appreciation the day you get your degree - in the graduation hall." On the one hand, the argument was that parents often did not show appreciation for their children and therefore failed to "reward" and encourage them; on the other hand, they showed little understanding of poor performance - "they only punish".

An analysis of the data leads to the conclusion that emotional warmth was a strong factor in parent-child relationships and that its absence could be seen as a weakness in family life. It is therefore clear that the question on the "how" of parenting underlines the importance of love and a nurturing parent-child relationship as a strength in parenting. Its absence can be regarded as a weakness in the family life of black South Africans.

There is a second important element of parenting which is highlighted both in the literature on this theme and by the findings of this research. This concerns the quality of the interrelationship between the respective parents or between the caretakers, which determines the climate for nurturing parent-child relationships.

4.2.2 The role of the interrelationship between parents (or care-givers)

The importance of the marital relationship between parents (or between other care-givers) as a strength in parenting styles is summarised by the research findings of Simons *et al.* (1990:378): "It is argued that parents who have a satisfying supportive marital relationship will provide a warmer affective climate in the home and be more available to respond to the needs of their child ..."

An analysis of the findings of the present study emphasises the importance of the marital relationship between parents (or care-givers). This means that positive and supportive family relationships are a strength in family life. On the other hand, the absence of a satisfactory marital relationship (and surely also the relationship when living together), as referred to in the previous quotation, was regarded as a weakness.

In Subsection 2.5 marital infidelity and marital strife were dealt with as negative factors in the marital relationship. Within the context of parenting, marital infidelity and marital strife are also relevant as destructive factors.

Group discussions in the Orange Free State were dominated to a significant extent by discussions on serious marital discord as a weakness in family life. There was particular reference to the problem of alcohol abuse by parents (especially fathers) as one of the most important social problems undermining family life. Parents in Mamelodi, outside Pretoria, also referred to the problem of men visiting beer halls and shebeens on their way home from work, resulting in their coming home intoxicated. This often caused problems.

The abuse of alcohol as a social problem undermining family life was often blamed on poverty, poor circumstances and low standards of living in black residential areas, in other words structural or socio-political factors, and was dealt with in previous chapters.

During the discussions, marital discord, alcohol abuse and the resultant neglect of children were linked to an impoverishment of family life, and as such should be seen as weaknesses. These weaknesses in family life were frequently used as an introduction to one of the most important aspects (weaknesses and problem areas), namely the absence of the fathers or their lack of involvement with their children and with family life.

During group discussions in the Western Cape and rural Natal there was specific mention of the contribution of a healthy male-female relationship towards a stable and healthy family life. From a group of grandparents in rural Natal came the following statement: "Family life means a certain relationship between husband and wife." The same speaker later continued: "Good family relationships contribute to respect by children."

It is clear from the above that, whether seen as a weakness or a strength, there was agreement amongst experts and participants of all three generations that the relationship between husband and wife was important in the rebuilding of family lives.

An analysis of the data correctly indicates that factors such as unemployment, poverty and daily commuting over long distances all had a negative impact on the "how" of parenting. Such structural factors exacerbated the absence of parents in the education and raising of their children, and were therefore problems in family life. Apart from migratory labour and the above-mentioned structural factors in the context of parenting, there were frequent references to socio-cultural factors in the "environment". These could be either related to, or seen in isolation from, structural limitations. Within this context there was also frequent mention of the "family in transition" and "modernisation". In order to systematise the discussions, the "tension" between what was dictated by tradition and the demands of an industrialised-urban lifestyle in black cities is analysed as "family life in transition" as far as role fulfilment and authority in marriage and family are concerned. The so-called lack of involvement of men/fathers in family life will receive special attention, since it was frequently mentioned within the context of marital relationships.

4.2.2.1 *Changing parent roles and the nature of parenthood*

The absence of fathers as husbands to their wives and the lack of involvement of fathers in their homes were interpreted as a weakness in the practice of parenthood.

The "traditional" family was seen as a segregation of roles in almost all the discussions where the role fulfilment of wife/mother and husband/father was discussed. This was seen as a rigid division of tasks where the woman was responsible for household tasks and the man was seen as the breadwinner and disciplinarian.

In a group discussion with parents (mothers and fathers) in a rural part of the Northern Transvaal, a participant expressed herself as follows: "In the past there was a clear-cut division of labour in the household. The wife used to remain home, whilst the husband ventured out." The respondent then referred to changes which brought about the unemployment of men, so that they were at home more frequently whilst the women went to work in order to earn an income.

There was a general acceptance that circumstances had changed, and this change was linked to the paid employment of women.

A mother who participated in a group discussion with parents explained that a *mosadi* was a woman who stayed home and took care of children. Her subsequent argument stated that when women were full-time housewives they were able to perform all household duties and to take care of children. Where women were involved in paid labour they were unable to fulfil all these tasks without some male assistance.

Within the context of changing family roles which brought about marital problems (a weakness in the "environment" of parenting), there was frequent debate about the participation of men in household tasks.

The mention of male participation in household tasks caused mixed reaction. This reaction could mostly (though not always) be linked to gender and age. A young man in the Western Cape made the comment that a father and mother had to earn money in order to maintain a "good" quality of life and that men obviously would help with household tasks and the care of children. Within this group a "decision" was taken that a sharing of household tasks might in fact constitute an "emerging norm", but that it had not yet been institutionalised or even generally acknowledged.

The middle generation, and professional married women in particular, expressed strong opinions about the necessity of sharing household tasks.

This theme did not receive much attention in discussions with grandparents, and male participation in the household was not discussed. This could imply more acceptance of traditional customs, but it could also be related to the fact that many of the grandmothers were widows who were not employed and who had no husbands to assist in the house!

Participants in a work seminar in the Eastern Cape were asked about the normative nature of the "sharing of household tasks". They answered in unison: "Not in our culture." A parent whose opinion was asked about men's participation in the household said the following: "On a day-to-day basis I would feel a bit awkward about this. I wouldn't mind the occasional cooking or washing of dishes when women in the household are not able to do this for some or another reason."

This mirrors a general view in many parts of the world: it would be nice, but is not normatively prescribed or expected.

An interesting comment made during a few group discussions was that mothers could teach their sons to perform household tasks, such as cooking and cleaning up. However, as a Mamelodi mother put it, even if most young men were to learn these skills, as soon as they got married "it dries up".

The findings of this study support what was found in research in various communities, namely that there was increasing "tolerance" (irrespective of sex or generation) for participation in taking care of children, both physically and otherwise. The absence of this participation was emphasised as a problem in family life. This argument is dealt with under Subsection 4.2.2.3 (Lack of involvement of fathers).

4.2.2.2 *Family authority as strength or weakness in marital relationships*

The traditional view of the "man as undisputed head of the household" was preferred during discussions on the role of the male/father. This was frequently linked to Christian dogma and the Bible. During a group discussion with parents in a rural part of Northern Transvaal, this was discussed in detail and a participant asked himself why children and women had to submit to the father as head of the household. He answered his own question with the following explanation and legitimisation for the ascribed authority of the male/father:

> *The reason is that when a woman got married she was counselled as to how she should treat her partner - always regard him as her father. The woman should never object to that. One can still go back to the Bible, to the period of Adam and Eve when she subjected herself to him.*

Practical prescriptions which support male authority were supplied:

- When a husband returned home late, his wife should not ask him where he had been. His food should be ready and should be served without question. In one group, members suggested that if a wife "corners" her husband, he should tell her that he had been with another woman!
- Mothers should "report" on the education of their children. There was little mutual discussion about problems, and (as one woman added) the woman was to blame if children showed behavioural problems.

There was once again agreement that circumstances had changed, but attitudes in this regard were ambivalent. The "pull factor" towards maintaining the traditional state of affairs was strongest in the case of men, but was supported by many women.

A group of parents in a Transvaal rural area expressed this ambivalence in the following way:

> *Authority is a joint effort between husband and wife but the father ultimately remains the head. Men must speak up and give their views as heads of their families.*

Another participant asked how one could share authority, a question which confused the majority of the respondents.

In a similar type of discussion, a group of grandparents concluded as follows:

> *It is difficult to maintain these norms. According to the Bible man and woman cannot be equal. Consultation, but not equality. The man will remain the head of the family and should be regarded as such.*

In other group discussions there was also agreement that there should be deliberation between parents, and between parents and children, but that this did not necessarily imply egalitarian marital roles.

Economically active women, and professional women in particular, often protested the traditionally ascribed authority of men. The practical interpretation of this was that it gave men the right to demand their wives' income. This was vehemently protested. In a group discussion with experts in the Orange Free State there were strong feelings about the fact that men expected working wives to maintain the household while the men did not contribute anything themselves. The opinion was that in such cases women preferred to take care of the children themselves, and could do without the men. A group of nurses in the Transvaal Lowveld commented that men who had had no advanced education saw nurse wives as a "jackpot"!

During the Pretoria work seminar the previous findings were shared with the audience. This led to a discussion about educated women who did not accept their husbands' authority, and in fact undermined it. This strong form of "womanhood" was seen as a threat to fatherhood. It was linked to migratory labour which allowed women to take over the role and authority of men: "Fathers have lost their identity in their families." During the same discussion a grandfather/father who was a spiritual leader expressed the opinion that the father remained the head of the household even though he did not "bring food into the cupboard", and that women and children were traditionally under the "rule of the father". The changes referred to, such as women who had "education" and brought home a salary, caused a degradation of the male role. Thus women "took over", so that men had to prove their "maleness" through drink, sport, et cetera. The respondent's appeal to women was the following:

Value fathers as great men even if they are not good workers.

One could speculate that this man's occupation and age contributed to the fact that the women in the audience did not react, especially since similar remarks in other discussions met with resistance.

Somewhat later in the same discussion a grandmother related her "happy life" in a rural-traditional environment. She referred to family transition and made an interesting remark, namely that although white males could also be called the "head of the household", there was more teamwork between them and their wives. She found this absent in black families and felt that children now appeared to be the responsibility of the mother, and that they did not respect the father.

These and similar contributions led to the conclusion that the marital relationship, as the environment within which parenting takes place, was experienced as a strength when it played a positive and supportive role, but as a weakness where it was absent or impacted negatively on family life.

The picture presented was that "women had taken over the male position and authority of the man". During group discussions with all three generations a further theme emerged, namely the lack of involvement of fathers in their families, as discussed briefly in the previous sections.

4.2.2.3 *Lack of involvement of fathers*

As shown in the previous sections, the "signs" of role conflict began to emerge from the group discussions. Indications were, however, that the weakness which was experienced applied specifically to the fathers' lack of involvement in the rearing of children.

Once again traditional styles of parenting were scrutinised. Reference was made previously to the fact that the "traditional" view of the father, as a figure of authority who deserved respect, brought about an "emotional distance" between fathers and children. This means that fathers communicated with their children "through" the mothers, and that children had little experience of "open" communication with their fathers.

Due to the fact that mothers were responsible for the physical care of babies and young children, young people saw them as more accessible in terms of discussing their problems or talking to when they (the children) had done something wrong (according to a young participant in a work seminar in Pretoria).

During most of the discussions the statement was made that fathers should play a greater role in family life and be more involved. A mother in a place of safety for children was asked what meaning she attached to parenting styles that "promote

family life". The second item on her list was that parents should share the parenting, in other words both should participate in raising the children.

In the discussions about the non-involvement of fathers as a "cultural legacy", an interesting remark was made, namely that the role of tradition should not be exaggerated. The argument was that, after all, men had the *Kgoro*, "a place where men could sit with boys and talk about manhood".

This indicates a greater involvement of fathers with boys, and coincides with the findings of Harris and Morgan (1991). In their research a clear relationship was found between marital satisfaction and the involvement of fathers. The following quotation from Harris and Morgan (1991:540) indicates a clear correspondence with the findings discussed above in terms of the need for more research in this area.

> *Future research should examine more closely the relationship between marital quality and fathers' involvement with children. Wives may increasingly demand that husbands more equally share the role of parenting. They may do so because of increased time constraints and their greater power that comes from labour force participation, and because of the influence of feminist ideology that stresses equality.*

These words underline the relevance of marital relationships as part of either a supportive or a destructive environment for parenting.

Ahmeduzzaman and Roopnarine (1992) related certain socio-demographic factors to the involvement of "African-American" men with preschool children. They found that higher levels of education, higher family income, marital stability (as indicated by years of marriage), support from outside the family, productive communication styles and a greater commitment to the family all corresponded to greater involvement of the fathers in taking care of and socialising preschool children.

Therefore an analysis of the data supports the importance of fathers' involvement in parenting. When programmes are developed to support strengths in parenting, this should be taken into account since it plays such an important role in giving meaning to what a family should be like.

A further aspect "investigated" in the present research was the supportive or supplementary role that education, as an institution, could play in strengthening the primary socialisation of children in the family.

4.2.3 Primary socialisation and the relationship of parents with the school

There was strong support in the present study for the statement that the "family as an institution" is central to the socialisation of children.

An analysis of the transcriptions showed that the "message" of the parents' role in primary socialisation emerged in one form or another in virtually every discussion. It is within this context that education was considered supplementary to primary socialisation (which may or may not take place in homes).

The realisation by parents of their responsibility therefore constitutes the one "environment" where their role as primary socialisers went hand in hand with their acknowledgement of the need for the supportive function of education.

Parents also realised that they were often not equipped to fulfil their responsibilities as parents. Their own socialisation had not prepared them for their task as agents of socialisation. It is within this context that an appeal was made to school education in terms of support and of "taking over". The message from a group of rural Transvaal parents and a group of rural Natal grandparents was effectively a request for help. During a work seminar a more specific need for assistance with discipline was expressed - schools should help to discipline the rebelling new generation. On the one hand, this may imply an acknowledgement of parents that they did not always know how to socialise their children, but on the other hand, the time factor was also mentioned. Parents saw their children too seldom to socialise properly - they often left home before the children left for school and only got home very late. The result was that teachers spent more hours a day with the children than did their parents. A group of parents in the PWV area felt that houseworkers were actively involved in the socialisation of white children at the expense of their own children. A youth group in a rural part of the Transvaal referred to the problem of "truancy" resulting from children spending many hours without parental supervision; they therefore emphasised the assistance of schools.

In the same youth group, however, the question was asked whether parents would not be inclined to transfer their responsibilities to the school, if the latter was asked to assist in the primary socialisation of the children. This was also mentioned during a work seminar in Pretoria where it was argued that children had more faith in their teachers than in their parents, and preferred to take their questions to the school. Within this context the message was not "help us", but "you cannot socialise us".

A third important viewpoint concerning primary socialisation at home and at school was expressed at a work seminar in Pretoria. A young male respondent made the following remark:

Parenting styles and education go together.

He argued that parents who were more educated were more capable of sensible parenting, since education gave people a sense of responsibility and a more sensible

approach to problem solving. His argument was that education brought relief which could help to change parenting styles which had become irrelevant and did not "fit" into the modern environment. His conclusion was that in their task of primary socialisation "parents must be educated to parent".

Another crucial facet of parenting styles was related to communication and discipline and emerged as a possible element in the "training" of parents. Once again there was an appeal to teachers for support. This is discussed in the following section.

4.3 The dimension of control, and monitoring of parenting styles

The orientation of parents towards authority plays an important role in the dimension of control and monitoring. Miller *et al.* (1986:504), for example, state that authoritarian parents with a high degree of control over their children are the least successful in bringing about an internalisation of parental values in children. Less authoritarian parents tend to have children who show more socially appropriate behaviour, according to specific indicators. Less authoritarian parenting should not be equated with an uninvolved or permissive style of parenting. In a study on the use of drugs and alcohol Coombs and Landsverk (1988:480) qualify this difference in a profile of youths who have abstained from the use of alcohol and drugs as

> *... one where both parents play an active role in providing counsel and advice, setting limits, and offering trusting and encouraging relationships. Rather than by using punishment, such parents maintain control by clarifying appropriate behaviours, reinforcing them with praise and encouragement, and maintaining warm, caring relationships so that their children desire to please and emulate them.* (During a working seminar in the Eastern Cape (Queenstown) a distinction was made between discipline for the sake of instruction and guidance, and punishment in the physical sense.)

Taking the above into account, the data for this study were analysed and results regarding control and monitoring were divided into three categories: discipline and communication; their functions with regard to sex socialisation and the problem of teenage pregnancy; and monitoring in terms of preparation for marriage and family life.

4.3.1 Discipline and communication

An analysis of the transcriptions reveals that discipline and the nature thereof were frequently discussed together with demands for more communication between parents and children. Within this context a boy in a place of safety said, for example,

"They (parents) just hit us and give us no time to explain." When the transition from traditional-rural to industrialised-urban is considered (as these distinctions were made during the discussions) the relationship between discipline and communication takes on even more meaning.

The picture which emerged from the first and second rounds of group discussions, and which was subsequently "tested" during the work seminars was one of a parent giving a command, seeing that it was obeyed, and reprimanding or applying corporal punishment without finding it necessary to explain. This reflected a one-way communication style, whereas children and youths expected an "open" style of communication. This impression was repeatedly tested during discussions and was strongly confirmed by the participants. During discussions with youths, and with youths and older generations combined, it appeared that this was experienced as a "gap" between parents and children. Thus the younger generation expected explanations, and they wanted to be able to question in a way that would not be considered as uncontrolled arguing. A youth expressed it as follows: Parents did not say "This is life" but only "Don't, don't". It was clear from work seminars that the older generations were developing an understanding for this point of view of the youth. Youths also acknowledged that they expected a style of parenting which was unfamiliar to older generations (particularly grandparents) and for which their socialisation had not prepared them. The traditional style amounted to parents talking while children listened, and to fathers talking via mothers when they wanted to instruct or give orders; children expressed their wishes via their mothers to their fathers.

One student referred to the traditional parent-child relationship as a "structured situation" rather than as a personal relationship. A grandmother who listened to a discussion on this theme commented that in the olden days parents and children did not "sit together" and that it was difficult to talk about contemporary "open" communication when older people still experienced these cultural "barriers".

One could say that communication is one of the themes which was strongly emphasised during virtually all the discussions, but that this was always regarded as a cultural problem; something that needed to be addressed. The following interesting issues emerged during discussions on discipline and communication:

- A student from the University of the North said the following:

  Concerning discipline amongst blacks there is this thing that most blacks are "maternal" family type. If you do something wrong in your family they call in an uncle ... By so doing we young people feel violated - we want to be respected, taken as an individual. You want your parents to discipline you individually, not calling someone from far, an uncle or aunt to sit around the table. Sometimes it is not a big issue, just small things

which you can explain - why you do this or that. Parents can say "this is wrong, you should not do it again" and it ends there.

Another issue concerning discipline within the wider kinship network was that communication between parents and children about misbehaviour did not take place directly between parents and their children. The parent felt that since the child was not allowed to question him or her, uncles and aunts were available to give reasons for punishment and communicate with the child in this regard.

Against this background one can understand children protesting against parents who punished without any explanation.

- During discussions about the role of the father in the family (discussed above), there appeared to be a clear insistence that children should see their fathers not only as disciplinarians. During a work seminar a grandfather blamed mothers in this regard, since they tended to "threaten" children with their fathers. However, mothers were also too protective and left the fathers little room for interacting with the family. During these discussions the respondents seemed to favour a style of parenting where fathers and mothers shared the raising of children, including the discipline of their children; children felt that the reasons for disciplinary measures should be explained to them. This was associated with the transmission of values and norms by both parents to their children. A grandmother added that a father's direct involvement with disciplining his children would uphold the name of the father and his commitment to the forefathers.

  A female student had the last word:

  To me a family is supposed to sit around a table and the father would say: "O.K. my kid, I like this and this thing I don't like." Then us children will know what to do and not to do - not only what and when you have done wrong.

- Youths, in particular, expected fathers to communicate directly and not via mothers or relatives, and this featured heavily in many group discussions. In this case the role of kinship and the institution of the kinship network as co-socialising agent were explained. During the work seminar in Queenstown a shy young male referred to certain words which were traditionally avoided and which caused people (including parents) to "beat about the bush, otherwise it was viewed as rude".

  A group of schoolgirls argued that communication between parents and children and especially between grandparents and grandchildren was prevented because the older generation made so much use of stories when they disciplined. In another discussion these stories were called "parables". The girls wanted educators to communicate directly and to provide explanations.

- It was frequently mentioned that discipline could only be successful if it was consistent and if parents themselves set a good example. The argument was that rules worked better when children knew the reasons and those who made the rules; also when parents agreed with each other and saw to it that the rules were followed.

  A young man argued that children who had come of age had the right to act against parents who deviated from existing norms. It was considered difficult to accept discipline from parents who were poor role models.

- There was much debate about the desirability of corporal punishment. Strict discipline and corporal punishment combined with love and communication were never rejected as unsuitable. There was a strong realisation of the role of fathers in the socialisation of adolescent boys. It was added, however, that corporal punishment was not the only form of discipline and that it should not be applied without an explanation and appropriate communication.

  During a group discussion in Paarl a young boy related how his parents had locked the house. Consequently, when he needed something inside in order to complete his homework, the only option was to climb in through the window. This resulted in a hiding, since his father did not permit him an explanation. The audience were divided on this issue - older generations felt that the father was correct, whereas the younger ones regarded it as a "faulty style of parenting".

Statements concerning corporal punishment reflected that it was more acceptable in rural than in urban communities. The respondents felt that people in urban communities were more aware of the importance of communication and realised that there were alternative forms of punishment. They also remarked that urban parents were careful not to hit their children, since they feared the disapproval of the street committees.

- In some discussions religion was regarded as a strength in family life and in terms of the discipline of children. A grandmother said that parents who communicated with God would also find it easy to communicate with their children.

During a few discussions emphasis was placed on the positive example of parents, as an element of parenting in the context of sex socialisation and communication. This issue is analysed below.

4.3.2 Communication, sex education and teenage pregnancy

In the literature considerable attention is paid to the control and regulation of the sexual activities of adolescents as an element of parenting. Miller *et al.* (1986:505) write about this and refer, *inter alia*, to the study of Hagan and Kitagawa (1985)

which focused on 1 000 black (American) adolescents between the ages of 13 and 19. The study indicated a close relationship between the parental control of girls' love lives and sexual activities, and the incidence of early pregnancies. Sixty seven per cent of those girls who reported little parental control over their courting behaviour were sexually active, compared to the 44% who indicated that their parents practised a high degree of control. Girls with low-control parents had a pregnancy rate of 34% against the 20% of girls whose parents exercised a high degree of control. The rate of sexual activity was 76% higher among girls whose parents were slack in exercising control over early courting and sexual behaviour.

Obviously in research such as the above, parents and adolescents have different views on what control, supervision and regulation mean. This does not, however, detract from the experience of parents and children that many "problems" are experienced in this regard. It is placed high on the list of weaknesses in family life.

An analysis of results from the group discussions can be presented in the following categories:

4.3.2.1 *Sex education in a traditional context*

During group discussions with parents and grandparents, traditional customs regarding sexual matters were discussed extensively. A picture emerged which was "tested" and debated in work seminars (which included all three generations), against the background of the demands of parenthood in a contemporary context. The following aspects were emphasised:

- Mothers and women in the extended family were mainly concerned with girls, whereas boys spent their time in male company; consequently boys and girls were to a large extent "separated" from each other during puberty and early adolescence.
- Boys (and girls) were guided towards responsible adulthood during initiation in school. The sexes received separate instruction, including sex guidance and preparation for marriage.

The sex education of girls was usually done by "old ladies" and collectively, and after they had reached a specific level of physical development and had started menstruating. Thus girls seldom received face-to-face sex education from their mothers or grandmothers.

- Virginity was the norm (it was linked to family pride and *lobola* negotiations). Once again relatives or "old ladies" undertook regular inspections to determine whether unmarried girls had intact hymens.

- Older sisters or relatives were assigned to younger girls to supervise their behaviour with boys during prepuberty and puberty.

Mothers were not necessarily directly involved in the shaping and normative development of sexuality in their daughters.

- The above-mentioned control and protective measures contributed to a low incidence of teenage pregnancy. Although the babies were not stigmatised, certain sanctions applied to girls who fell pregnant before negotiations for a union with a specific man had commenced.

During a work seminar the problem of sex education in a modern urban environment was expressed as follows:

> *Sexuality education has been there for many years in our traditional communities. It was done formally e.g. through initiation schools and informally by grandparents who gave lessons to children through stories and tales. The children were taught values and norms of the community and failure to comply with these usually led to drastic punishment and humiliation by elders of the community.*

She continued by saying that

> *[M]odern society shows a breakdown of the extended family system and the practices of old. Society became permissive and morals have gone down. Most black parents spend the better part of the day at work leaving their children to fend for themselves. They* (children) *spend most of their time in the company of their peers. They have freedom and opportunity for sexual contact. This has led to the high incidence of teenage pregnancies.*

4.3.2.2 *Parents as sex educators and the role of the school*

In the light of the previous discussions one can understand why mothers and grandmothers in particular felt uncomfortable at providing personal sex education to growing girls. They were expected to assume a role for which they had not been prepared, since their own biological mothers had seldom discussed sexually related matters with them. Mothers and grandmothers were very embarrassed at discussing sex openly with their children.

On the other hand, parents and grandparents who participated in group discussions indicated that they accepted and acknowledged the fact that they had a responsibility regarding the sex education of their children. Youths mentioned the following:

- They were reproachful because they received little or no sex education from their parents or grandparents. The debate often concerned the question of whether

parents were in fact the best people to perform this function. Students in an urban environment and a group of schoolgirls in a rural area argued that they were "shy" to discuss these matters with their parents or to consult them about their love lives. They relied instead on peers, the school and what they had learnt from the mass media.

- Youths complained that communication about sexual matters was not open and honest, but was done by means of transparent stories. For example, babies were "bought" or "fetched from the river" and nurses brought babies in brown suitcases. A little boy who enquired why an old lady had a big stomach was told that she had eaten too much at a party.
- Insufficient communication was also prevalent when girls started menstruating; they were then told:

  to beware of men;
  to be careful not to fall pregnant;
  to be careful of irresponsible men;
  to beware that men are "just playing around"
  (a group of girls in KwaNdebele).

The objection was that parents did not explain and did not provide sufficient information about what it was that the young people had to be careful of.

- At school the youths learned about the anatomy of their bodies and in conversations with peers they decided that they could not rely upon their parents for honest answers.
- Time and again parents and young people reached the conclusion that the school had a role to play, either to supplement the role of the home, or as the only sex educator. During a work seminar in the Eastern Cape a parent added that focused sex education by schools should not deal only with the "birds and the bees". Rather it should be incorporated with a study of the anatomy of the human body, so that children could relate the knowledge about their bodies to their sex lives and sexual maturity.
- Many respondents felt that a relationship of trust between parents and children could provide an early climate for open communication about sexuality. It would help parents to talk to their children about sex, changes in their bodies and the consequences of early sexual activities. A parent who participated in a work seminar in Pretoria added that "girls must know what arouse men to be warned against rape and forced sex".

4.3.2.3 *Norms regarding courting and premarital sex*

The debate in this regard again focused on differences between "tradition" and "modernity". In the Natal countryside a grandmother said: "Our tradition is that the boyfriend is not allowed to enter the girlfriend's home, that is our custom. Because this will make him do whatever he likes and forget about family." This relates to the above-mentioned custom that adolescent boys and girls traditionally did not mix freely and without supervision.

Youths repeatedly pushed for a revision of the customs. They felt (during a work seminar in the Eastern Cape) that parents did not trust them and thought that if couples who were in love visited each other they would necessarily "sleep together". They argued that parents "must be educated to allow us to mix".

During a group discussion with respondents of all three generations where courting and premarital sex were discussed, an interesting observation was made. Older people accepted the arguments of the youths, but could not bring themselves to verbalise the fact that the norm against premarital sex and visiting together of youngsters of different sexes had become redundant in the urban environment. The young people felt that they were forced into "clandestine" meetings in the bushes, instead of visiting openly in one another's homes. If a young man could openly visit a girl in her home, it would provide parents with the opportunity to get to know him and to satisfy themselves of his honest intentions. A young man who felt that he was trusted would also show more respect towards his girlfriend. The middle generation did not take serious issue with men visiting their daughters, but the grandparents still found it unacceptable.

On the one hand, grandparents experienced the prescriptive power of tradition but, on the other hand, they also saw in the mass media what they interpreted as loose morals. This, together with an acknowledgement that the norm of premarital chastity had disappeared, lent prominence to the fear of teenage pregnancy.

4.3.2.4 *Premarital sex and contraception*

An analysis of the transcriptions revealed that the norm against premarital sex had disappeared and, in religious circles, was subscribed to in theory only. Apart from this, there was an acknowledgement of the fact that living together ("vat en sit" or "grab and sit") was becoming increasingly common. During group discussions this led to a strong focus on contraception as prevention of unwanted pregnancies.

During a group discussion the youths acknowledged that there was a lot of peer pressure to experiment and to participate in sexual activity. The peer group dictated that girls would become isolated and have no male friends if they did not yield - or "prove fertility". A young male in the Eastern Cape insisted on having sex, since his

friends had convinced him that if he did not have sex his sperm cells would travel through his spine into his brain and cause him to "lose his mind".

The older generation had many myths about contraception and told many "stories" about permanent sterility and other side effects. According to the older generation, the use of contraceptives encouraged promiscuity. Thus, on the one hand, they feared unwanted pregnancies but, on the other hand, they did not want to encourage loose morals due to the use of contraception. A grandmother expressed it as follows:

> *What really makes these kids fall pregnant is this family planning. This encourages them to indulge themselves in sexual intercourse because they know that they are protected by contraceptives. This family planning leads to sterility and by the time the person wants a baby she can't conceive.*

Her representation was supported by the rest of the group.

4.3.2.5 *Teenage pregnancies*

The "problem" of an increase in teenage pregnancy has been mentioned frequently, and no further elaboration is necessary. It should be seen against the background of a world-wide increase in teenage pregnancy.

There were moral objections to teenage pregnancy, and it was also seen as a problem, since it meant that schoolgirls had to interrupt their school careers; it therefore also influenced their future careers. A grandmother expressed it as follows: "Teenage pregnancies mean perpetual parenting to grandmothers" (work seminar in Pretoria).

Without exception teenage pregnancy was seen as a weakness in the family life of black South Africans and was viewed with great concern. This also related to the increase in single parenthood which was viewed by some as a problem and which will be discussed shortly. To conclude the discussion on control, support, discipline and regulation, some findings on ways to prepare for parenthood are discussed, since they are relevant to the next chapter.

4.3.3 Preparation for marriage and/or parenthood

The following aspects have already been discussed and will briefly be mentioned in terms of the preparation for parenthood:

- The school can support parents in the sexual education of their children. This concept includes more than studying subjects which describe reproduction.
- The example of parents is one of the most important elements in the preparation for family life.

- The role of family planning and contraception should be discussed together with parents for the sake of addressing sexual intercourse before and within a marriage.
- During a work seminar in Port Elizabeth, co-operation between parents, children and the school or teachers was emphasised.

Likewise there were pleas for co-operation between parents, educators and family planning clinics:

- The possibility of more involvement by the social work and nursing professions was mentioned as a measure to educate people for family life.
- Probably the single most important aspect of preparation for parenthood was the development of communication skills between the parents themselves, and between the parents and their children.
- During most group discussions the participants agreed that parents and grandparents could not simply socialise the children according to the "pattern" or style of parenting followed by their own parents. This placed preparation for parenthood high on the list of priorities for the development of programmes to strengthen family life. Single parenthood was included here.

4.4 Parenting in single-parent homes

During group discussions the existence of single-parent homes was often regarded as a weakness in family life. The following remarks are applicable when considering the context within which the concern was voiced:

- The respondents mostly referred to young girls who had babies whose biological fathers were not prepared to accept responsibility as a parent. This led to a situation where the parents of the girls had to support the single-parent family. Emphasis was placed on the economic problems of such a situation.
- There were a few cases where it was felt that children whose questions about their biological father remained unanswered could develop personality problems. Reference was also made to the inability of mothers to control their sons, particularly adolescents, in the absence of a father figure. The same problem was experienced where fathers were present but uninvolved, so that mothers had to cope on their own.
- Experts frequently referred to mothers who preferred to raise their children by themselves. The mothers perceived their children to be better off in single-parent families than in "complete" families where children were neglected by both

parents. Mothers who were single parents by choice were mostly confident that they were capable of fulfilling the so-called double-parent role.

However, parents in the Orange Free State saw these "free-floating" professional women as a threat to the marriages and families of other women.

Parenting in single-parent homes should certainly be placed within a broader context, namely that of the phenomenon of single parenthood as the fastest growing family type in most countries. Thus, the ideology of "the family" as the nuclear family can be questioned since there is a diversity of family types.

4.5 Structural limitations to realising constructive parenting styles

Reference has previously been made to the socio-political situation which was repeatedly emphasised during the discussions. At the risk of repetition, the following comments relating to parenting styles are appropriate:

- It was frequently argued that poor accommodation and overcrowding were detrimental to constructive parenting and good family relationships. In particular, it was perceived to give rise to early sexual experimentation and a loss of respect between family members.
- Poverty and unemployment, which form part of the socio-economic fabric, was regarded as another limiting factor in constructive parenting. It led to conflict between parents and children.
- During one group discussion the problem of uninvolved fathers was linked to the poor self-image of men, and the socio-economic situation and the political situation were blamed for this. Men were often more exposed to unemployment than women; this led to frustration which was detrimental to family relationships.
- The respondents repeatedly saw the government-controlled educational system as detrimental to parenting. A teacher said that within a westernised inferior bantu educational system he had to teach things which he himself did not practise.
- Politics and party-political divisions "separated" school and home, confused children and were detrimental to education.
- On the one hand, religion was seen as a strength and a cohesive force in family life. On the other hand, there were accusations that Christianity destroyed the traditional conserving culture - "good culture was discarded".
- A parent made the following comment: "Black people have no more control over their children because the government controls their lifestyle which has a negative bearing on their children."

4.6 Interpretations and conclusions

In the beginning of the chapter the problem of "understanding" the concept "parenting style" was explained. Because of this problem the analysis of transcriptions concentrated on the "how" of parenting. Unstructured discussions were consciously chosen to unravel the meanings which the respondents gave to various issues. In retrospect it might have made more sense to provide more guidance as far as this dimension was concerned.

Discussions with professionals, group discussions with the three generations and the work seminars all focused on different dimensions of parenting. Consequently the data were structured according to the outcome of these discussions.

By way of conclusion, the interpretations and findings will be related to the general theme of strengths and weaknesses in family life. In most cases the acknowledgement or acceptance of the importance, and even the necessity, of certain dimensions of parenting were seen as strengths. These dimensions should be incorporated with supportive programmes. The absence of these dimensions was experienced as a negative factor and explained as a weakness. Discussions about the absence of certain essential dimensions included references to the socio-political context within which black families had to function. Bearing in mind the dimensions of parenting as deduced from the data, the interpretations, conclusions and consequences for programme development can be summarised as follows:

4.6.1 Parent-child relationships

In all the discussions the respondents emphasised the importance or "strength" of emotional warmth and closeness in parent-child (or educator-child) relationships. It appears to be an essential value to which people strove and should be incorporated when programmes are developed. The "absence" of parents in the educational situation and consequent deprivation of loving care and support in personal problems that children suffered were explained as a weakness in family life, particularly by the younger generation.

Within the context of nurturing parent-child relationships, the socio-political situation was frequently mentioned: parents had to travel long distances to work, they were too poor to afford alternative care-givers and there was a critical shortage of day care in the townships. The "lack of involvement" of parents in the education and primary socialisation of their children was seen as a weakness and can be characterised as "secondary neglect".

The absence of the father was regarded as a further weakness in family life. Migratory labour was a destructive force in this respect, but youths also questioned

the extent of paternal involvement in the traditional context. With communication between parents and children (especially fathers and children) in mind, parent development programmes may have to cater for socialisation or resocialisation for fatherhood.

A further dimension of parenting that received considerable attention, was the nature of the relationship between parents or between caretakers as part of the climate in which parenting took place.

4.6.2 Marital relationships

The emphasis on positive marital relationships between parents or care-givers should be seen as a strength in family life, and should be incorporated with programmes. On the other hand, problems in marital relationships should be seen as a weakness in parenting.

Weaknesses or negative factors in marital relationships focused mainly on weak parent figures, and were related to alcohol abuse, poverty and, at times, illiteracy. These factors were seen to lead to infidelity and marital discord, particularly with regard to marital roles and authority in families.

Mention was made of "families in transition" and tension between traditional customs and norms, and the demands of the contemporary urban-industrialised environment. These factors were seen as causes for generally tense marital relationships.

Youths were concerned about the traditional role of respect and authority which was not open to being questioned. They subscribed to more contemporary demands for open communication between parents (or other care-givers) and children. This constituted a further demand in terms of preparation for parenthood. Such preparation may include socialisation and/or resocialisation in order to prepare people for a new era. Programmes should take this into account.

4.6.3 During the discussions, especially during work seminars, the role of education in parenting was investigated. Older generations were ambivalent about the role of teachers in sex education but there was general consensus that the school could play a part. Closer ties between school and home were needed. Existing programmes (FAMSA) in larger centres should be expanded and evaluated in the light of the above considerations.

4.6.4 "Open communication" between parents and children was emphasised throughout. It was clear that there was an understanding of the fact that traditional parenting styles could not accommodate the "new" emphasis on open communication (this was true of all the facets). This constitutes another relevant area which requires consideration in the development of programmes.

Sex education emerged during all the discussions as a dimension of parent-child communication. It was regarded as an essential dimension of parenting and its absence was regarded as a weakness. There were also requests for assistance from older generations in this regard. This will have to be dealt with in programmes for the development of parenting skills.

4.6.5 Socio-political and structural factors clearly featured prominently in the minds of the respondents and were seen as an important contributing factor in the breakdown of family life. They will have to be dealt with consciously in the reconstruction of communities in the "new era".

Research in family sociology shows that the areas of parenting which were shown to be important in the course of this research are not exclusive to the family life of black South Africans. This means that although Anglo-American programmes cannot be duplicated, they can serve as models which can be adjusted to provide for differences. In the minds of the participants in this research, family life remained very meaningful and could be strengthened by programmes.

4.6.6 A realisation which was frequently voiced was the need of parents for assistance in order to parent in a meaningful way. This theme will recur repeatedly in the last chapter. A need for programmes was evident throughout, particularly for parenting programmes.

An analysis of the data emphasised problems or weaknesses but there were positive elements and "success stories" despite an often "unfriendly" environment. This underlined the resilience and resourcefulness in family life and parenting.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

If today's families are to bequeath continuity to the next generation, and that generation to the next, it should be forcefully evident that a new level of vigilance is required. The weakened state of today's family needs our concerted attention. If we assume that the institution will persist by the sheer good fortune of history or the fondness for nostalgia, I fear we will be mistaken. The ingredients are present for us to ensure that our personae and collective family heritages are preserved. However, we will need a fuller understanding of the current malaise, additional effective interventions, and a renewed societal commitment to the institution. We must create the vision of bequeathing family continuity if we are to achieve it (Spanier 1989:11).

5.1 Introduction

The relevance of the words above and the extent to which the research identifies with them, are obvious. The quotation relates to a choice regarding the subject to be researched, the nature of the research design and the application of the findings in possible programmes "to create the vision of bequeathing family continuity ..."

Perceptions in this regard could probably elicit criticism from certain quarters. Nevertheless it was functional to situate the present study within the general theme of "strengths and weaknesses", especially with a view to developing guidelines for the possible development of support programmes. Against this background the conclusions will deal with the theme, and will highlight the consequences of the study for a family policy. Concluding remarks and recommendations will be based on the findings related to the three areas of research. These remarks and recommendations should be taken into account in future research and in the development of programmes.

By way of introduction, it is necessary to consider in broad terms whether the research was able to meet the objectives which were originally defined.

The first, general objective was to obtain more information about the family life of black South Africans. A concomitant aim was to allow the research area to be defined by black South Africans themselves. Thus the information and the methods of collecting data had to be based on the experiences and views of black people themselves. This had certain methodological implications, in that qualitative research was required which, in turn, had its own inherent problems. These problems were emphasised, particularly in the previous chapter.

With a view to possible programme development and the formulation of an informed family policy the conclusions and analyses were intended to be applicable and practically orientated.

The pilot study emphasised the general theme of strengths and weaknesses in family life. Three areas were initially highlighted, namely underlying norms and values, the decline of parental authority and the lack of knowledge about parenting skills. After subsequent discussions it was decided that these areas should in fact be studied.

Against this background the most important strengths and weaknesses, as well as ambivalent interpretations of strengths and weaknesses were categorised.

Chapter 5 concludes with consequences which can be deduced with regard to the development of programmes and informed policy planning, and some evaluations are made and supplemented with recommendations for further research in this field.

5.2 On strengths and weaknesses in family life

The rationale for positioning the research and consequently also the research findings were repeatedly explained in the light of the weaknesses, which could be treated as problem areas, and the strengths, which could be incorporated with support programmes as "proven" positive factors. It was often apparent during the discussions, particularly in the work seminars, how a theme could be regarded as either a weakness or a challenge for change and growth, depending on the perspective of the discussants (based on their age or status, i.e. class position). This was the case particularly with regard to the "decline" of certain cultural or "traditional" customs. What was initially viewed with concern, could frequently be redefined by further discussions in order to retain or isolate the positive elements, such as happened in the case of the custom of *lobola*. This way of dealing with strengths and weaknesses and of redefining them in changing circumstances can be seen as indicative of the resilience of family life and as a part of a "strategy for survival" which can be built into programmes.

The above conclusions were "presented" to audiences during discussions and often led to an acknowledgement of the positive value of focus group discussions which could serve as a basis for the future development of support programmes. With this in mind, the formulation of an informed family policy in a new era was also seen to be important.

5.3 Strengths in family life as basis for programme development

The high value placed on children and family ties by all three generations should be regarded as a strength when programmes are developed. Future policies should recognise this in order to promote "healthy" family life.

A further strength which featured very prominently was the high percentage of grandparents taking responsibility for grandchildren and children of other relatives and even friends, rather than allowing such children to be neglected. Grandparents who participated in group discussions often made appeals for supportive programmes which would enable them to develop the necessary parenting skills. Policies will have to deal with the phenomenon of grandparents as parents, especially to enable them to fulfil their financial responsibilities. It is impossible for grandparents to support growing and school-going children on their limited pensions without direct financial support.

5.3.1 Strengths in underlying values and norms

Respect emerged as the pillar which supports all value systems. There was also agreement that family-directed values and normative patterns should be transmitted to new generations in the process of socialisation. The process of social change in values and norms was likewise considered time and again. In discussions on family values and norms and their transfer, there were clear signs of understanding the gap between what "should" be and the practice of the day. This paved the way for thoughts on traditional values and norms and promoted a possible redefinition with regard to the strong factors in traditional customs. This has innovative potential for maintaining strengths and adapting them to changing family and community circumstances in the planning of programmes. On the normative level certain traditional customs were seen as a strength by older generations in particular. One example is the wider kinship network, which expands parenthood beyond the so-called nuclear family. The system of *lobola* was likewise verbalised as a positive factor which contributed to family stability, and counter-influenced the increase in divorce. Similarly, it was felt in the discussions that polygamy should not be rejected out of hand as a norm which has fallen into disuse, but that it could contain positive elements.

Norms and values relating to the control of sexuality, particularly premarital sex, were regarded as strengths in family life, notably by parents and grandparents. In this case, too, change was subjected to careful scrutiny.

Values and norms applicable to the family life of black South Africans emerged as normative customs which bring about stability, although they have changed and declined amid the modernisation and development in the socio-economic and socio-political climate of South Africa. In the development of programmes the "debate" on the functionality of customs such as polygamy, *lobola*, and "traditional" male and female roles, amongst others, should be taken into account. This is necessary, especially in the light of the high incidence of grandparents who act as parents.

5.3.2 Strengths regarding parental authority

The diversity of family life and experience (and therefore the untenable ideology of "the black family") emerged very clearly from this research. An analysis of the transcriptions of discussions indicates that the three generations differed in opinion as to what "ideal" meant, for example in connection with parental authority. Men and women also had divergent experiences and visions for a future "healthy" family life. This also holds true for parents with higher and lower levels of education, in other words different socio-economic classes.

The latter tendency is supported by the literature, and class differences are relevant particularly regarding characteristics which emerge as strengths in family life. Emphasis on obedience and autonomy differs, as found after hypothesis testing by Luster, Rhoodes and Haas (1989:139):

> *... the lower a parent's social class position, the more likely he or she is to value conformity or external authority ... The higher the parent's social position, the more likely he or she is to value characteristics indicative of selfdirection such as interest in how and why things happen, self control, and responsibility.*

A similar tendency emerged in the present research and has obvious consequences for programmes for the development of parenting skills.

Although considerable emphasis was placed on the decline of parental authority during the discussions (to the extent that the negative side of the matter was prominent) the positive aspects which were also apparent during discussions should be incorporated with programme planning. As indicated in Chapter 3, a clear search for the redefinition of authority and obedience was apparent during "open" discussions. Younger generations frequently felt that they did not purposely "create" the decline of parental authority, but rather that changing circumstances made it necessary to discuss this with the older generations. Herein lies a strength for the reconstruction and enrichment of parent-child relationships. The fact that the younger generation denied the total decline of parental authority should thus be regarded as a strength and should be utilised in the development of programmes as

a "platform" for discussions about the different meanings given by the various generations to such indicators as the questioning of authority, behaviour and dress.

There were other indicators which were experienced negatively but about which new "insights" were developed during the discussions. These included the roles of education and religion. The strong factor in this case was the need experienced by all three generations to communicate with each other, notably about the negative experiences of the older generation and a different meaning given by the younger generation.

There was agreement on one strength: the re-evaluation of the role of fathers as educators and a shift away from a possible perception that fathers are either absent or not involved, and are generally weak figures.

5.3.3 Strengths in parenting skills

One of the primary strengths regarding parenting skills relates to the general theme of the importance of children and of family life for black South Africans.

Within this context the cardinal importance of nourishing and emotionally stable care of children was confirmed time and again during discussions on the dimensions of parenthood. The acknowledgement of this issue was frequently accompanied by a feeling of inadequacy - a "how can this be realised?" This facet should be considered and discussed with parents and experts in the planning and development of programmes.

Poor and unstable relationships between parents/care-givers themselves can be developed as a strength in support programmes. Poor relationships are experienced as contributors in the decline of family life. Single-parent households require particular support.

5.4 Weaknesses in family life and consequences for programme planning

A concern that was generally expressed during the discussions was the gradual decay, decline and disorganisation in the family life of black South Africans. Different levels of change in family life were emphasised.

5.4.1 Weaknesses regarding the decline of values and norms

Certain values mentioned in Section 5.3 as strengths, when absent, represent the most important weaknesses in the family life of black South Africans.

Some specific examples of this include the decline of respect between parents and children, and between parents themselves. In the latter case the fact that the father is

no longer seen as the head of the household, and that he is no longer honoured in terms of his position of authority, was experienced as a weakness in some discussions. There was a great deal of debate on this issue and the ambiguity and uncertainty about the father's role in a changing context seems particularly relevant for the planning of programmes. To this should be added the emancipation of women and their demands for an equal position within the family.

Another weakness was the ambivalence experienced by parents about the role of education as supplement to the primary socialisation which may or may not take place in families. In the development of programmes this should be incorporated in order to bring parents and teachers closer together in discussions.

Grandparents expressed great concern about the decline of control over the youth. This can be seen as an important weakness in family life. The youth experienced this as a communication gap between educators and themselves, and not necessarily as an example of the decline of respect and authority.

A prominent weakness that emerged regarding norms and values, was the norm of virginity and early sexual activity of children which often ends in teenage pregnancy and single parenthood. This would obviously be an important area in the development of programmes.

5.4.2 Weaknesses regarding the decline of parental authority

Respect and authority were seen as norms that have declined. The results of this fact were observed by older generations, particularly the uncontrollability and disobedience of the growing generation.

In this area the younger generation experienced the weakness in family life as an inability of parents to communicate with their children in a meaningful way. They also laid claim to mutual respect - parents should earn respect and should also show their children respect.

The decline of religion as a directive in the lives of people was seen as a further weakness related to the exercise of parental authority.

5.4.3 Weaknesses regarding parenting skills

The absence or inadequacy of parenting skills, which are regarded as a building block for "healthy" families, was (as in the previous cases) experienced as a weakness and a factor leading to family disintegration.

Some factors regarding parenting skills understandably emerged repeatedly in seminars and group discussions. These are summarised by way of conclusion.

Father absence in single-parent families was often discussed. Reference was made not only to the physical absence of fathers as care-givers and educators, but also to

their lack of involvement and the consequent scarcity or absence of communication between children and their parents, in particular their fathers.

Negative or disorganised marital relationships make meaningful parenting virtually impossible - this was a conclusion frequently reached after intensive discussions.

Uncertainties arising from rapidly changing circumstances highlighted the vulnerability of families in transitionary phases. This will have to be dealt with in supportive programmes, and the possibility of training and resocialisation should be accepted.

A problem mentioned frequently was the fact that meaningful and positive relationships between school and home have not yet been institutionalised. Innovation in supportive programmes could yield good results.

In general the socio-political inheritance featured in virtually every discussion and seminar on weaknesses and problem areas.

5.5 Socio-political factors

The essence of socio-political factors was mentioned throughout the report. A few remarks may serve to summarise the thoughts in this area.

Programmes to support families can obviously not exist without attention to structural factors. Community service and reconstruction are closely related to this. The quality of life of people in urban and rural neighbourhoods was frequently related to family disintegration. Poverty and poor housing, unemployment and the absence of recreational facilities are but a few examples that were mentioned. Supportive programmes can therefore only be successful to the extent that they are accompanied by an improvement in the quality of life.

The previous remarks coincide with what has already been said about the empowerment of people, which underlies the development of programmes and the upgrading of communities and community life.

Poverty, migratory labour, poor or no housing and long distances from the workplace are a few of the destructive forces which have impacted on the family life of black South Africans over many decades. Coupled within this is the fact that, to the best knowledge of the researcher, little has been done on a national level to estimate the damage, to take responsibility and to plan corrective measures and reconstruction.

5.6 Development of programmes

Cognisance should be taken of existing youth programmes, FAMSA and other reconstructive services.

In the development of family programmes to support family life, the existing programmes should be integrated and extended if they are to become a meaningful part of the reconstruction of community and family life in the future:

> Family life was basic to most of the people who were involved in the research; generation and communication gaps may have existed, but through discussion a point was reached where it became possible to bridge differences through reasoning and redefinition;
>
> Younger and older generations realised that there may be a gap between norms and reality, and this also provided an opportunity for innovation and bridging;
>
> Work seminars seemed to provide a promising "platform" to enable older and younger generations to talk to each other, to explain points of departure and to reach compromises — everyone seemed to appreciate this fact;
>
> The planning of programmes can only succeed if they are developed "in the field" where participants can contribute freely and assume a shared responsibility.

As far as work seminars and the planning of programmes were concerned, an interesting and relevant phenomenon emerged repeatedly. During work seminars the themes which had emerged from previous discussions were presented in terms of strengths and weaknesses. A short introduction by someone from the audience was normally followed by a general discussion - this time a discussion by members of all three generations, as well as a discussion between experts and parents with no professional training. At times one had the impression that some parents felt hopeless after younger people had criticised or questioned existing traditional parenting styles. Still there was a group effort to search for solutions - "what should be done?"

One finding which featured very prominently in one form or another in all group discussions, was the lack of communication between parents and children, between parents themselves and between families and other social institutions.

This was the case particularly with regard to sex role socialisation and the lack of involvement of the husband/father in parenting. This has direct consequences for the development of communication styles as part of parenting, and a general need in this respect was expressed. One of the many comments was that "parents should be educated to parent; should be trained to be sex educators".

The family "climate" for parenting was frequently related to marriage and family roles. This point could be pursued by research which aims at testing hypotheses, for example, the hypothesis that "the more wives/mothers experience that household

tasks are shared with the husband/father the higher will be the degree of marital and family adaptation or happiness".

In relevant literature it is reported that certain parenting styles "stimulate deviant behaviour" among children. This means that children tend to follow the same styles of parenting in a spiral or cycle of self-perpetuating "deviant behaviour" (Kandel 1990:192). This has consequences for the development of programmes, especially in the light of social problems such as alcohol abuse, marital infidelity and prostitution, amongst others. Likewise, the development of programmes cannot avoid taking notice of structural factors and socio-political influences.

5.7 Consequences of the research for family policy

In the last decades family policy as a part of social policy has provoked much discussion and thought on the part of family sociologists. South Africa is certainly not the only country which lacks a well-considered family policy which is applicable to all families. Few countries in the world have a well-planned and informed policy. South Africa boasts many an example of political or ideological policy with consequences which have apparently not been adequately considered.

One example (which featured prominently in this research) must surely be the destructive consequences of the policy of group areas and influx control, which were linked to migratory labour. A further tendency in policy was to justify differences in family allowances by referring to the "traditional" extended family and kinship networks. The rationale was that the "extended family" would take responsibility for the well-being of its members. Against the background of the extreme poverty which was frequently cited as a structural limitation during group discussions, the care of the poor, the needy and others who qualify for welfare by the "traditional extended family" appears to be unfeasible and is an example of a shortsighted policy.

Don Edgar formulates the policy of the Australian Institute for Family Studies regarding the "privatisation" of economic support for families as follows: "The family cannot survive alone." As social unit the family is linked to all other social institutions and is partly shaped by the allocation of power and resources. Families (in this research "black families" in a special sense) need more support than that provided by the so-called extended family.

In this study family policy is highlighted due to the repeated focus on socio-political and structural factors which should be seen as "weaknesses" in the family life of black South Africans. In the new era which lies ahead more research as well as more focused research will be essential for the "democratic" development of a family policy in support of the diversity of families. If one focuses on structural

factors, many of the findings of the present research are supported by the following quotations from American and British policy documents:

> *What we need for our most vulnerable children is what we need for all children: a nurturing home; decent affordable housing and safe community environment; a healthy start in life, education that prepares them for a productive future; families with the means to support them financially and emotionally* (American policy document from Edgar (1991:34)).

> *Policies should be adaptable to support all kinds of family as fewer families conform to the traditional model of family life, public policy should seek to support the process of family life, whatever the shape or size of the family unit* (British policy document from Edgar (1991:34)).

Therefore, from the quotations and this research one can conclude that all family research will have to be linked directly to the formulation of family policy.

A second statement could also be ventured: based on the strengths and strategies for survival, all family research and informed family policy will explicitly have to aim at empowering people. The latter statement emphasises the importance of "participant research".

Grandparent groups, especially those in rural areas, frequently urged and supported the formation of development programmes. Grandparents showed great willingness to be trained "to parent in the present situation" (grandparents in the Natal rural area) and appreciated the reality of "the higher the education the more understanding" (a parent group in urban Pretoria).

A work seminar in the Eastern Cape was characterised by an emphasis on the fact that programmes should not create a dependency on professionals. The confidence of parents in their own skills should not be undermined and for this reason programmes have to be developed in specific communities and should be geared towards the particular needs of those communities and towards participant research.

It was emphasised that church organisations should be involved in the development of programmes, but even more emphasis was placed on programmes which could bridge the gap between families and educational institutions.

A final interesting remark which was made at many group discussions (particularly in Bloemfontien) is that it is difficult to involve fathers. Support programmes and the development and presentation thereof in the work environment should therefore be investigated.

5.8 Concluding remarks

By way of conclusion, two quotations which speak for themselves have been selected:

> *The fact is that the family, like other institutions, is in a perpetual state of evolution rather than dissolution. It interfaces with those institutions in a panorama of complex transactions; sometimes as an independent variable, other times as a dependent variable, perhaps most often as an intervening variable. Its ability to mediate, translate, and incorporate social change in the process of socializing its members is one of its major strengths ... Family relationships and structure will continue to adapt and evolve and survive because despite their vulnerabilities no society has yet created a better and more enduring method of raising its young and passing on basic social values* (Berardo 1987:427).

> *Understanding of and teaching skills will remain important, but the new generation scholars in family life education will make their lasting contribution by making an impact on the system.*
>
> *These new family life educators must be able to articulate family needs in terms of the social and economic climate for families. Making a more profamily, prohuman environment will only occur by helping to bring about change in the social structure* (Schvaneveldt & Young 1992:389).

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